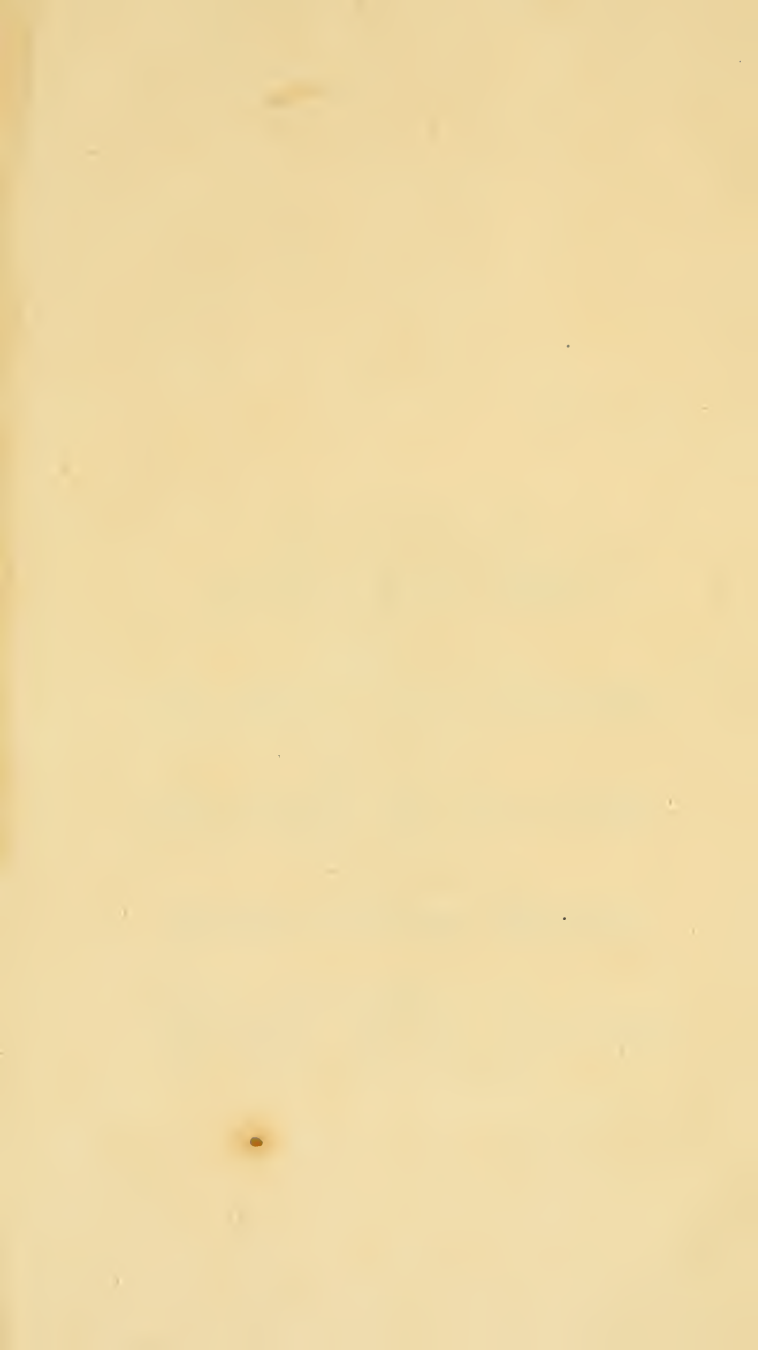


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THE
CHRISTIAN SYSTEM

UNFOLDED IN A COURSE OF

PRACTICAL ESSAYS

ON

THE PRINCIPAL DOCTRINES AND DUTIES
OF CHRISTIANITY.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

By THOMAS ROBINSON, M.A.

VICAR OF ST. MARY'S, LEICESTER.

*Hold fast the form of sound words, in faith and love, which is in Christ
Jesus.—*

*For the time will come, when they will not endure sound doctrine.
2 Tim. i. 13. iv. 3.*

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1805.

THE
CHRISTIAN SYSTEM.

VOLUME THE SECOND,

CONTAINING

PRACTICAL ESSAYS

ON THE

PERSON, OPERATIONS, AND FRUITS,

OF THE

HOLY SPIRIT.

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PRACTICAL ESSAYS

ON

CHRISTIANITY.

ESSAY XXXII.

ON THE PERSONALITY AND DIVINITY OF
THE HOLY SPIRIT.

The interposition of the Holy Spirit necessary. We may prove I. His personality—from his attributes and operations,—II. His distinct personality—by his procession both from the Father and the Son,—his appropriate offices,—separate appearances,—and the particular mention made of him.—III. His divinity—from his names,—perfections,—works,—and the regard due to him.

THE system of redemption, as far as it has been already unfolded in these essays, cannot fail of exciting the gratitude and admiration of every serious enquirer. Great and marvellous indeed are those dispensations of divine grace, which have passed in review before us, while the person,

the character, the work, and offices of the Saviour have been under consideration. Yet all this provision for our deliverance would be totally useless, except some powerful influence were exerted upon our minds, to induce our ready compliance. Such necessary influence is afforded, sufficient to remove every hindrance, and to make effectual application of all that hath been done and suffered by Christ on our behalf. Here then our attention must be turned to another distinct and sovereign Agent in the economy of man's salvation. The sacred scriptures every where represent the HOLY SPIRIT as bearing an essential part in the wondrous plan, and working IN us, even as Jesus Christ by his obedience unto death hath wrought out FOR us, whatever is requisite for our complete recovery.

Yet, clearly as this doctrine is expressed, and though it runs throughout the Bible, we have occasion to lament, that few comparatively are properly grounded or instructed in it. Many are so grossly ignorant of the nature or necessity of this divine influence, that, if closely interrogated, they might reply with some of old, "We have not so much as heard, whether there be any Holy Ghost *." Others among us are in a state still more deplorable. There are those, who set

* Acts xix. 2.

themselves with a malignant and contemptuous opposition to scoff at the expectation or belief of his assistance, and even deny his being. Such is the infidelity which prevails in modern times, and we are aware from what source it springs. Men are conceited of their own ability to think and act aright, and therefore reject with disdain the offer of any spiritual aid. They should however be warned, that this pride of heart, on which their system is founded, is most dangerous and may be destructive to their souls. We lament also, that there have been sad mistakes and abuses of the doctrine, where it is received; so that if we would maintain a solid and consistent religion, it is as necessary to guard against the presumptuous and wild imaginations of the Enthusiast, as to repel the attacks of the Deist and Socinian.

With a view to these different cases, it is proposed to enter at some length into the discussion of this important subject, and to enquire what is the scripture account of the person, the offices, and operations of the Holy Ghost. But that we may not rest in curious or vain speculations, let us entreat his gracious assistance. May his light shine upon our understandings, and his fire warm and purify our affections! May his strength support us in the performance of every duty, and his comforts revive us under every distressing diffi-

culty! — We shall offer some considerations, which evince

I. His personality. By this expression we mean not to explain his mode of existence, which is allowed to be mysterious, but merely to denote the reality of his Being and his Agency. It will not be denied, that almost all the sacred writers speak much concerning the Spirit of God, who is also termed the Holy Ghost, and ascribe various effects to his interposition. Now we contend that their method of speaking is strange, contradictory, and unintelligible, if we admit what some suggest, that the Spirit has no subsistence but is only a divine attribute, as the wisdom, or the power of God, or as any other appendage of Deity. He is described as possessing qualities and perfections of his own, and as performing various operations. Every thing, which we understand to be personal, and to belong to a real positive existence, is ascribed to him. Such are those declarations of our Lord concerning him, which, though in some measure accommodated to the weakness of our conceptions, sufficiently prove on every fair interpretation, that He is not a mere adjunct of another, but is of himself endued with life, activity, and a high degree of intelligence. “When HE is come, HE will reprove the world.” The expression is not IT, as if an attribute or an inanimate creature were spoken of, but HE, which obviously denotes a person.—“He will guide

you into all truth ; for he shall not speak of himself ; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak ; and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me : for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you*.”—In like manner when we read of his “ striving,” and of his being “ resisted,” “ vexed,” and “ grieved,” what can we conclude, but that he is capable of exerting an influence, and possesses sensibility and affections † ? Are not these things demonstrative of personality ?—An argument equally conclusive may also be drawn from St Paul’s description of the spiritual gifts, bestowed on the church of Corinth. Whatever might be the nature of those operations he ascribes them all to the agency of the Holy Ghost : “ all these worketh that One and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will ‡.” He acts, we observe, not only in a powerful but in a sovereign manner, according to his own uncontrolled volitions. How is this to be rendered consistent with the Socinian scheme, which will not allow him any real existence at all ? To say, that this is no more than figurative language, is not only an arbitrary ungrounded assertion, but extremely dishonourable to the sacred writers, as if they were ambiguous and never to be depended on. We grant

* John xvi. 8—14.

† Gen. vi. 3. Isa. lxiii. 10. Acts vii. 51. Eph. iv. 30.

‡ 1 Cor. xii. 11.

that at times they make use of strong figures, but these are easily to be distinguished, and in general not difficult to be understood. The descriptions, which they give of the Spirit, are uniformly the same, and it is evident that these are not dressed up with oratorical or poetical embellishments : for they occur in the plainest passages, and run throughout the whole. They prove also

II. His distinct personality. Though we maintain the unity of the Godhead, yet we learn from the scriptures, that there is a plurality of persons subsisting in that unity. They act in complete harmony, and many operations are ascribed equally to them all. But we are not therefore to understand, while we read of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, that there is only one person, or that, however the name be varied, the same agent is intended. That there is a distinction, though a perfect union in their nature as well as design, will appear from the following considerations.

The Holy Ghost is represented as proceeding, and receiving his commission, both from the Father and the Son, and therefore they cannot be in every sense the same. Our Lord's declarations are very explicit : " I will pray the Father, and he shall give you ANOTHER comforter,—even the Spirit of truth :"—" whom the Father will send in my name."—" When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even

the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of me.”—“ If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you *.” Exactly similar is St. Paul’s description; “ God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father †.” The just inference to be deduced from such phraseology as this, is the very point which we are endeavouring to establish.

To the Holy Ghost some appropriate offices are assigned, for the accomplishing of man’s salvation: and accordingly he performs certain distinct operations. “ He shall glorify me,” says the Son; “ for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you ‡.” “ It is the Spirit that beareth witness §:” and the influence which is exerted upon the human mind, for the implanting and increasing of all good desires, principles, and affections, is in a peculiar manner ascribed to him. It should seem, therefore, that to Him the prayer of St. Paul is addressed, for it makes separate mention also of the Father and the Son: “ The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ ||.” This, however, will be more fully evinced and clearly illustrated, as we proceed in the subject.

There have been distinct symbolical appear-

* John xiv. 16, 17, 26. xv. 26. xvi. 7.

† Gal. iv. 6.

‡ John xvi. 14.

§ 1 John v. 6.

|| 2 Thess. iii. 5.

ances of the Holy Spirit. At the baptism of Jesus Christ, whilst the Father by an audible voice declared, "This is my beloved Son," the Spirit "descended like a dove, and lighted upon him †." On the day of Pentecost also, the communication of the Spirit to the Apostles was represented by cloven tongues like as of fire, sitting upon each of them: and St. Peter's exposition of this miracle proves incontestably, that the Agent, though acting in union with the Father and the Son, or by commission from them, was yet a different person. "This Jesus," he said, "being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear †." These appearances, we allow, were merely emblematical of the Spirit's operations, and cannot convey to us any adequate conception of his real nature, or the mode of his existence; but they sufficiently establish the position we have here laid down.

It is observable likewise, that on other solemn occasions, where the names of the Father and the Son are introduced, distinct mention is made of the Spirit; from which we infer, that he subsists and acts of himself. In the form of baptism, as instituted by our Lord, it is required that in that ordinance we should be consecrated or set apart for God, "in the name of the Father, and of the

* Matt. iii. 16, 17.

† Acts ii. 3, 33.

Son, and of the Holy Ghost *.” In the apostolical benediction a separate address is made to Him, and we are taught to pray for that peculiar “fellowship of the Spirit,” to which he alone can introduce us: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all †!” Here indeed our subject rises upon us, and we are constrained to express the most devout reverence and adoration of this exalted Personage, to whom the prayers of all the churches are continually directed. What shall we say of Him, to whom divine honours are paid? Proofs in abundance might be produced to evince

III. His real and proper Deity. Though, like the Messiah who became incarnate, he submits to perform a part in the amazing plan of man’s salvation, and we shall have reason to admire his grace and condescension in sustaining the offices assigned him, yet he is not employed as an inferior instrument. It will appear by various considerations, that he was originally possessed of all the glories of the Godhead, and that he is, equally with the Father and the Son, to be loved, depended on, worshipped, and obeyed. This will be shewn by arguments similar to those, which have been brought to prove the Divinity of Jesus Christ.

* Matt. xxviii. 19.

† 2 Cor. xiii. 14.

1. The names, which are applied to the Spirit, clearly ascertain his high character. He is called "Holy" and "the Holy One," as being eminently so above all creatures, and as being the author of all that holiness which they possess. But this is a title, which distinguishes "the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity*."—We cannot doubt that he is God, because he is so denominated by the sacred writers. Thus, to be "born of the Spirit," and to be "born of God," are used as synonymous or convertible terms†. To "lie to the Holy Ghost," is to "lie unto God‡." The "spiritual gifts," which the Corinthians received, are all declared to be the work of "that one and the self-same Spirit;" and yet concerning these operations St. Paul expressly asserts, "It is the same God, which worketh all in all§."—He is that "Lord," to whom Israel will turn, when the vail shall be taken away, and who alone can "direct our hearts into the love of God||."—Still further, He is "JEHOVAH, God of Israel;" for it was no less a Personage, "who spake by the mouth of his holy prophets," and "all scripture is given by inspiration of God;" but these "holy men spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost**." It

* Isa. lvii. 15. † John i. 13. iii. 5, 6, 8. 1 John v. 1, 4, 18.

‡ Acts v. 3, 4.

§ 1 Cor. xii. 6, 11.

|| 2 Cor. iii. 16, 17. 2 Thess. iii. 5.

** Luke i. 68, 70. 2 Tim. iii. 16. 2 Peter i. 21.

was JEHOVAH, who thus admonished his ancient people, “To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts;” and yet “the Holy Ghost saith it*.” Isaiah received his commission from JEHOVAH, “the Lord of hosts, of whose glory the whole earth is full;” but that very commission is ascribed to the Holy Ghost as its author†. We cannot therefore hesitate to pronounce, who this is, to whom such exalted titles are given.

2. His attributes will also lead us to the same conclusion. There are certain perfections appropriate to Deity, which we consider as incommunicable to any creatures; and by these the Holy Ghost is described and distinguished. He is “the Eternal Spirit‡:” and He is also the Omnipresent, who “filleteth heaven and earth;” for “Whither shall we go from Him?” And does not he dwell in all the saints§?—The knowledge of all finite beings is limited, but the Spirit is Omniscient; for He “searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God,” and no one knoweth them, but he alone||. The same is also manifest from this consideration, that “He teacheth all things,” and even “sheweth things to come**.”—He is likewise the Omnipotent; for the most wonderful works of the Lord are ascribed to the

* Psal. xcv. 6, 7. Heb. iii. 7.

† Isa. vi. 1—10. Acts xxviii. 25, 26. ‡ Heb. ix. 14.

§ Psal. cxxxix. 7. 1 Cor. vi. 19. || 1 Cor. ii. 10, 11.

** John xiv. 26. xvi. 13.

energy of His might, as we shall soon observe: and it should seem that on this account he is called “the power of the Highest,” and “the finger of God *.”—When we read of him under those descriptions, “the Spirit of holiness,” “the Spirit of truth,” and “the Spirit of life †,” whether we understand from them that he possesses the perfections of holiness, truth, and life, in a way of eminence above all creatures, or that he is the grand source, from which these are communicated to others, in either sense they establish the doctrine of his Deity, and shew that he is the proper object of our affiance, love, and adoration.

3. His works are unequivocal attestations of the same point: for they are such, as no being of limited or imperfect faculties can be competent to perform. Creation itself is ascribed to him: for he “garnished the heavens,” and “moved upon the face of the deep,” to reduce the confusion of chaos to order, and to impregnate dead matter with life and animation ‡. The continued existence of all creatures depends upon his influence. When he is withdrawn, “they die, and are turned again to their dust;” and his mighty agency can effect a resurrection: “Thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created: and

* Luke i. 35. xi. 20. † John xiv. 17. Rom. i. 4. viii. 2.

‡ Gen. i. 2. Job xxvi. 13. xxxiii. 4. Psalm xxxiii. 6.

thou renewest the face of the earth*.” We are assured too, that at the last day our scattered dust shall be collected and revived by him: “He that raised up Christ from the dead, shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you†.” He hath laid, and he conducts, the amazing plan of divine Providence. For “who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord? or being his counsellor hath taught him‡?” The inspiration of Prophets and Apostles, and all those abilities, by which both the church and the world are governed, come from him, and prove his wisdom is infinite. The miraculous acts of the Saviour, and all the signs and wonders of his servants, were wrought by the power of the Spirit, and clearly demonstrate the Divinity of their author§. Is it possible, that such can be the agency of a creature?

The consideration of his holy influences must be resumed, and carried through several succeeding essays; and it will appear that these very influences are no other than the emanations of Deity. But it may not be inexpedient to anticipate some part of that subject. We stand in admiration of the mighty energy of that grace, which produces a new creation in the soul, which restores life to the dead sinner, and does more than reinstate him in paradise; it prepares him

* Psalm civ. 29, 30. † Rom. viii. 11. ‡ Isa. xl. 13.

§ Matt. xii. 28. Rom. xv. 19. Heb. ii. 3, 4.

for, and conducts him to, the glories of the heavenly world. "This is the Lord's doing; and it is marvellous in our eyes." He is that "Spirit of wisdom and revelation," which giveth the knowledge of the Saviour*; and thus, where all was darkness, he introduces the dawning of a bright and everlasting day. Believers therefore are "light in the Lord†." They are "the workmanship of God, created in Christ Jesus;" and this is called in other terms "the renewing of the Holy Ghost‡." Their sanctification also is a work replete with wonders. What strength is requisite to subdue their corrupt affections, to keep in vigorous exercise their spiritual principles, to fit them for every duty and every trial, to sustain them in their arduous conflict, and transform them perfectly into the image of their God and Saviour! We do not hesitate to say, that a creature cannot effect it: and we are assured that the Spirit is the mighty agent§. He guides, He guards, and He comforts, the souls of the redeemed: He gives them access to the Father with confidence and joy, and introduces them into such a holy and blissful communion with him, as proves to them an earnest and a foretaste of the heavenly felicity||. We can be at no loss to ascertain the high character of the author

* Eph. i. 17. † Eph. v. 8. ‡ Eph. ii. 10. Tit. iii. 5.

§ 1 Cor. vi. 11. 2 Cor. iii. 18. 1 Peter i. 2.

|| Rom. viii. 14—17. 2 Cor. i. 22. v. 5. Eph. i. 13, 14.

from these his operations; and we exclaim in grateful adoration, "What hath God wrought!"

4. The Deity of the Spirit may also be inferred from the regard which we are required to pay to him. We are taught throughout all the scriptures to seek for his influences by fervent prayer, to depend upon them for the mortification of sin and for our growth in holiness, and to yield ourselves with unfeigned submission to his dictates and directions*. We must watch continually, that we do not "grieve" this gracious visitant, or "quench" that light and that fire, which we derive from him†. We must be led by him, and walk with him. We must remember, that we are devoted to his service in baptism; and to him, as we have seen, our supplications should be addressed, that we may be admitted into his communion. Our bodies are his temple: and the description implies, not only that he dwells in us, but that he claims us as his property, and that in us as in his temple he will be revered and worshipped‡. Are these, then, we ask, the claims of a creature? Or do we not acknowledge in them the rights of the supreme and Almighty God?

Whatever may be the nature of that offence, which can never be forgiven, it is an offence

* Luke xi. 13. Rom. viii. 13, 14. Gal. v. 25.

† Eph. iv. 30. 1 Thess. v. 19.

‡ 1 Cor. iii. 16, 17. vi. 19, 20.

committed immediately against the Holy Ghost : and we learn from the tremendous denunciations, by which we are warned to keep at a distance from the sin, how unspeakably great must be the dignity of that Person, whose honour is violated by it †. That this blasphemy should be a transgression against him, and especially that it should be unpardonable, proves at once that the object of it is no other, than the very and eternal God.

From the whole of these considerations such a strength of evidence arises, as we might expect would produce full conviction. Yet, alas! how many resist! Would to God, they were aware of their danger! The doctrine is important, and essential to the Christian faith. If it be renounced, we must at the same time abandon all that regard and obedience to the Spirit, which the scriptures indispensably require. O! let us fear, lest we perish by our rejection of the truth! But if the point here contended for be established, our hopes and comforts rest upon a firm foundation. We do not trust in an arm of flesh, or in the power of any creature which might fail us, but in the living God, “ who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think.” Depending upon him, we may rejoice and give thanks : for he will administer support and consolation, sufficient to bear us up in our deepest distresses.

* Matt. xii. 31.

The more exalted are our conceptions of the glory of the Spirit, the more wonderful must appear his condescension in stooping to so mean and polluted an habitation as the human heart, and his patience in continuing to strive with us notwithstanding all our perverse opposition to his grace. He is God and not man : therefore we are not consumed.

The subject should excite the most serious enquiries, What do we know of his influence ? Or, what evidence do our lives and tempers exhibit, that we participate of his benefits ? The discrimination is strongly marked between them “ that are after the flesh,” and them “ that are after the Spirit.” They stand at an immense distance from each other : let us search and try, To which of them do we belong ? Let us ask, What is our plan of action ? what the main object we have in view ? In other words, Do we “ mind the things of the flesh, or the things of the Spirit * ? ”

Enough has been said, to shew how sinful and dangerous it will be to deny or deride the agency of the Holy Ghost. He is jealous of his honour, and will severely punish the despisers of his grace. Let us not provoke him by our unbelief to withdraw from us, and give us up to obduracy of heart. Ashamed even of our

* Rom. viii. 5.

listlessness and indifference in a matter so momentous as this, let us no longer be satisfied to remain in ignorance of his sacred influences : for such an ignorance will be fatal to our souls. “ If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his *.”

* Rom. viii 9.

ESSAY XXXIII.

ON THE INFLUENCES AND OPERATIONS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

PART I.

The subject difficult—and mysterious—treated with contempt—much abused. Proper to consider, I. What the Spirit did in former times—chiefly with respect to redemption—raising up and qualifying men for great usefulness—restraining sinners—inspiring prophets—cooperating with Christ—giving miraculous powers to the apostles—founding churches, &c.—II. What he does in the present age.—His general influences vindicated against those, who object to them,—as absurd—unnecessary—or dangerous.

IF we are convinced by the arguments proposed, that there exists in the Godhead, possessed of all the perfections of Deity, such a distinct person and agent as the sacred scriptures denominate THE SPIRIT or THE HOLY GHOST, we should be induced to enquire, What is our peculiar concern with Him? and what regard does He claim from us? What do we understand or

experience of his gracious operations? This at least will be a proper subject for our examination, as we proceed to consider, what is his office in the economy of man's salvation,—what the work he performs,—what the benefits he bestows.

On such a topic, however, we should be reminded that “the place whereon we stand is holy ground.” Let us not advance with presumptuous rashness, but with deepest reverence for Him, “whose name is Holy,” and with much diffidence of ourselves, lest we should “darken counsel by words without knowledge.” Nothing can exceed in its importance the doctrine to be stated, for it enters into every part of practical religion: and the discussion is attended with peculiar difficulties. The very nature of the subject forbids all curious speculations. “It is as high as heaven, what canst thou do*?” Inexplicable mysteries may well be expected to be involved in it; for who will pretend that human intelligence is sufficient to investigate the divine operations upon the soul, or even upon the material world? “The things of God knoweth no man but the Spirit of God†.” There are also many things in the works of Creation and Providence equally out of our reach, notwithstanding men's boasted ingenuity and clearness of argumentation in their philosophical researches. They perceive certain effects, for

* Job xi. 8.

† 1 Cor. ii. 11.

which they suppose there must exist some adequate cause ; but what those causes are, to which they give names, or what connection subsists between cause and effect, they are in most cases unable to explain. May we not also allow the reality of the Spirit's influence, when we see the work which he produces, though we can neither control nor comprehend his operations ? “ The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth : so is every one that is born of the Spirit *.”

The subject is rendered still more difficult by the extreme contempt, if not malignity, with which every strenuous advocate for the doctrine is treated. It is seldom indeed that any candid attention is given even to the most serious and solid representation of it. The very mention excites disgust, every expression is carped at and made matter of offence, and those persons, who might otherwise be accounted sensible and prudent, are sneered at and held up to universal derision, as visionaries, fools, and enthusiasts, of a weak or a deranged intellect, as soon as they dare to declare their experience or expectation of the assistance of the Holy Ghost. Who sees not, that it requires uncommon caution and circumspection to avoid occasions of reproach, or even

* John iii. 8.

to maintain an argument with those, who are disposed to pervert our words, and turn them into ridicule? Surely, this unfairness in our opponents is to be lamented and complained of.

Yet we acknowledge with grief, that sad abuses of the doctrine have prevailed and do still prevail among those who contend for it. Nay, some even in modern times have made such absurd, inconsistent, and extravagant pretences to the communications of the Holy Spirit, that we should be ashamed to be ranked with them: and this tendency to religious wildness has much increased the difficulty of treating the subject of divine influences. We would carefully guard against fanaticism, which, as well as deism, has its dangers; and we should think it dishonourable to vindicate any claims or sentiments, which are not grounded on the written word of God, and will not bear a solid examination. Some, we know, speak of their visions and revelations, as if they were rapt up, like the Apostle, into the third heaven, and held conversation with its blessed inhabitants. There are those also, who wait for some violent impulse or agitation from the Spirit, before they attempt the plainest and most necessary duty. We hear with real concern, that there are religious assemblies disgraced with shrieks and vociferations, which must produce the most shameful tumult and confusion, and which are nevertheless injudiciously (we would

not say profanely) ascribed to the Holy Ghost. Pretences to the gift of prophecy have likewise of late excited an unusual stir among us: and it is grievous to remark, that so many have suffered themselves to be imposed upon by predictions, delivered in such language, as bears no stamp of the divine Spirit, and leaves no doubt of the derangement, or what is worse, the wickedness, of their authors.

All these we must leave to themselves: at least we have nothing to do with their absurdities, and it belongs not to us to defend them. We wish to separate the chaff from the wheat, and not to reject "the precious," because it is sometimes mixt with "the vile." Let us search the authentic records of revelation, and judge for ourselves, without being biassed by the sentiments of others, however respectable their names or powerful their party. But let us proceed to this important investigation with humility and prayer. May He, who alone giveth wisdom and teacheth man knowledge, guide, assist, and prosper us; preserve us from error, and direct us to those conclusions, which are agreeable to his mind and will! We consider

I. What effects are ascribed to the agency of the Holy Spirit in former times. This will necessarily lead us to resume some of those observations, which were suggested in the preceding essay. He is represented as the origin and support

of life to all creatures: all animation being produced and continued by him. Under his direction the great scheme of Providence is carried on from age to age. But the administration of the divine government, which is conducted by his mysterious operation, is ordered chiefly with a view to Redemption: and this also, with respect to its effectual application, depends entirely on his influence. For He not only concurs with the Father and the Son in the covenant of grace, which is no other than the counsel of the ever-blessed Trinity, but he consents to bear an active part in the execution of the plan; and we shall have occasion to admire his humiliation, forbearance, and kindness towards us through the whole of his work. The grand object is, to recover man to God; and out of the ruins of our fallen race to erect a spiritual edifice, in which the Deity may reside, and his glory be more signally displayed, than it was in Paradise. This vast and amazing scheme, which was designed from everlasting, has been carried on by various steps from the original transgression to the present moment; and it will not receive its completion till the final consummation of all things. We shall here remark, how much has been done by the Holy Ghost for the introduction, confirmation, and establishment, of that bright dispensation of light and mercy, with which we are favoured.

There has been no true knowledge of God, no

sincere obedience to his will, no spiritual intercourse with him, or sense of his love, in any age, but what has been produced by the energy of this divine agent. He has been pleased to manifest his gracious influence very differently at different seasons; but every degree of "righteousness, peace, and joy," both before and since the coming of the Saviour, must have been derived from the same source. Good men, wherever they lived, received all their excellence from him: yet he has distinguished some more than others, raising them up and employing them in a signal manner, for the purpose of maintaining and propagating true religion in the world.

Little appears of his communications in the antediluvian age; and it was probably a time of much darkness and general depravity. But his mighty influence was exerted upon Noah, who was commissioned to reprove and warn a careless and abandoned generation. With much long-suffering the Spirit strove with, while Noah preached to, the disobedient*. Moses also was qualified for eminent usefulness by singular gifts of the Spirit. No other person, in the old testament at least, was equally favoured, or employed for such exalted purposes: and it is beyond a doubt, that, while he revealed the mind of God to the Israelites, delivered prophecies, and wrought

* Gen. vi. 3. 1 Peter iii. 18—20.

miracles, he acted under the immediate and extraordinary inspiration of the Holy Ghost *. For his assistance in the work assigned him, a portion of the same divine influence rested upon the seventy elders; on which he exclaimed with a disinterested joy, "Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his Spirit upon them †!" Moses was removed from the earth, but the church was not deserted. The Holy Ghost appointed Joshua to the same exalted station, and fitted him for the office. For such was the promise, "As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee ‡." In like manner he has carried on his work, and maintained his cause in the earth from age to age, by a succession of men, whom he has endowed with all suitable qualifications, and whose exertions he has made effectual for his own glory.

It must not pass unnoticed, that even that mechanical kind of skill, which was requisite for preparing the proper furniture of the tabernacle, was communicated by him to Bezaleel and Aholiab §. And why should not the ingenuity of artificers, in all their useful inventions, be considered as his gracious gift for the benefit of mankind? We are taught to ascribe to his influence the wisdom of statesmen and the courage of soldiers, at least for the protection or deli-

* Deut. xxxiv. 10—12.

† Joshua i. 5.

‡ Num. xi. 16—29.

§ Exod. xxxi. 2, &c.

verance of his people Israel. Thus upon one after another, of the persons called JUDGES, the Spirit of God came, and enabled them by his mighty energy to surmount the most formidable difficulties *. By these means he continued to evince his watchful care over his church. And it should seem that with the same view he communicated especial revelations even to wicked men, as Balaam; to others of like character, as Saul, he imparted peculiar gifts for certain occasions; and many who have not known his name have been disposed, through his mysterious agency, as Cyrus was, to adopt and execute his plans for the enlargement, security, and comfort, of his church †. This remark may furnish us with the proper explanation of many occurrences, which might otherwise stagger and confound us.

The world has ever been indebted to the restraining influence of the Spirit over the minds of unprincipled and abandoned persons, for that measure of tranquillity and good order, which has prevailed in the earth, and without which it would have been impossible for society to exist. He has mercifully prevented them from doing ALL that was in their hearts, by exciting in them convictions and terrors, by rousing their consciences also to upbraid and alarm them, and thus as it were with a strong hand resisting and

* Judges iii. 10. vi. 34. xi. 29. xiii. 25.

† Num. xxiv. 2. 1 Sam. x. 10. Ezra j. 1. Isa. xlv. 1.

preventing the execution of their plans. This is one way at least, in which he has not only consulted the peace and comfort of his church, but kept the world in some sort of regularity and subjection, which otherwise would have exhibited scenes of confusion and wretchedness, beyond all our experience and conception. But, though this be a gracious administration, it will eventually add to the condemnation of the impenitent, as proving their determined opposition to God and the vile obduracy of their hearts.

True religion was preserved in the earth before the coming of Christ, chiefly by means of the Prophets. Those holy men were raised up in succession for this very purpose, received their commission from the divine Spirit, and acted under his immediate direction *. All their knowledge and abilities, their firmness, zeal, and courage, the miraculous powers which many of them possessed, their eloquence, and, in many cases at least, the very words which they delivered both in speaking and writing, were no other than the gifts and communications of the Holy Ghost. He sent them out, and he qualified them, to declare his will, to instruct and warn mankind, to predict the advent of the Saviour, and to leave upon record, for the benefit of future ages, their portion of the sacred volume, which we are

* Luke i. 70. 2 Peter i. 21.

assured “is given by inspiration of God*.” Let us bless the Lord for their eminent endowments, and for the great advantage, not only which former generations, but which we ourselves have reaped from their labours.

At length the Redeemer appeared, to establish his kingdom of grace and righteousness on the earth. But in the whole of his work, as well as in the effectual application of its blessings, we are taught devoutly to acknowledge the powerful agency of the Holy Ghost. Suffice it briefly to state, how much is ascribed in this respect to his operation. The human body of Christ was conceived and formed by him†. The appointment of Christ to the office of Mediator and his various qualifications for it, the eminent graces exhibited in him, and all “the mighty signs and wonders” which he performed, were derived in some sort from the influence of the Spirit, which was given to him, and to Him alone, in an unlimited degree‡. The same divine energy was exerted, when Jesus surrendered up his life: he was then supported, comforted, and enabled to exercise all holy dispositions; and thus “THROUGH THE ETERNAL SPIRIT he offered himself without spot to God§.” The Holy Ghost also, in

* 2 Tim. iii. 16.

† Matt. i. 20. Luke i. 35.

‡ Isaiah xi. 2, 3. lxi. 1. Matt. xii. 28. John iii. 34.

§ Heb. ix. 14.

effecting his resurrection, added the most incontestable evidence to his mission: for "being quickened," he is likewise "justified, by the Spirit*." In these various operations we acknowledge a profound mystery; and therefore we do not offer an explanation. Respecting this almighty agent it were to be expected, that his way would be in the unfathomable deep, and his footsteps not to be traced. But one thing is manifest from the description here given, that he acted throughout in conjunction with Christ, and that there exists a perfect union between the persons of the Godhead in accomplishing our redemption.

The most abundant effusions and astonishing displays of the gifts of the Holy Ghost were reserved for the day of Pentecost. It was intended and promised, that he should descend upon the primitive church with larger communications and more extensive powers, than had ever been experienced before, for the express purposes of proving that our crucified Redeemer was indeed exalted and glorified, and had "received gifts for men," and also for the propagation and establishment of Christianity in the earth. It were foreign from the design of these essays, to enter into any curious or minute discussion of those extraordinary powers, with which the Apostles and first

Christians were invested. We read, that “to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues.” It is not necessary that we should understand the precise extent of these, or point out the exact distinction between them. It is enough, that we perceive how entirely they were adapted to the occasion, how beneficial to the church, and how gloriously they displayed the energy of their divine author. We rest therefore in St. Paul’s conclusion, “All these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will*.”

It was indeed an amazing dispensation! The Apostles were commanded to “go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature†.” But how shall they attempt the arduous task? It seemed every way absurd and impracticable, considering what they were, and what immense difficulties they had to surmount. But this was the promise of their Lord, “Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me—unto the

* 1 Cor. xii. 8—11.

† Mark xvi. 15.

uttermost part of the earth*.” Accordingly, on the day of Pentecost the necessary assistance was afforded, and “they were all filled with the Holy Ghost:” and this extraordinary effusion was attended with certain external emblems of his operations, “the sound of a rushing mighty wind,” and “the appearance of cloven tongues, like as of fire †.” The miraculous effects were immediately perceived. By a powerful illumination of their minds, they obtained a clearer understanding of the Christian system, than ever they had possessed before. They were instantly enabled to preach with readiness in languages, which they had never learned. And, whereas they had been timid and wavering, they were now inspired with such zeal and fortitude, that no obstacles discouraged, no menaces or dangers terrified them. “They went forth and preached every where,” as the messengers of heaven, carrying their credentials with them; “God bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost ‡.”

Their success was amazing; but even this must be attributed to the same divine energy, exerted upon the minds of their hearers. The idols of the heathen fell before them: not all the wisdom, power, malignity, or policy, of their adversaries

* Acts i. 8.

† Acts ii. 1.—4.

‡ Mark xvi. 20. Heb. ii. 4.

could prevent the rapid and extensive propagation of the gospel. Many christian churches were soon founded in distant parts of the world, and they continued to increase and flourish, in defiance of all opposition. Among these churches the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit were diffused, during the infancy of Christianity, and for the three first centuries still added fresh attestations to its truth. At length they were withdrawn, being no longer wanted for the confirmation of our faith, the evidence for which is full and complete. But the divine agent has not forsaken the church: He is engaged to maintain the same glorious cause to the end of time; and there have been some favoured seasons at different periods, in which by remarkable interpositions and communications of his grace he has revived his work. We consider therefore

II. What effects are produced by the Spirit, or may be expected from his operations, in the present age. As there is no sufficient proof of miraculous powers among ourselves, or for many centuries past, we do not undertake to vindicate any pretences to them. We give credit to no boasted revelations, which at all differ from, or bring any doctrine not contained in, the sacred scriptures, or which supersede their use. The Holy Ghost, whatever may be the nature of his teaching now, cannot vary from his former testimony, or do other than illustrate and confirm

the doctrine of Christ. "He shall not speak of himself," said the Saviour,—“for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you*.” But the simple question for our consideration is, Does he exert any influence upon the human mind at this time; and of what sort is his agency? There are many, who allow his existence, and yet deny his influence, and contemptuously laugh at the idea of any spiritual communications; and some, who admit the general notion of his assistance, seem to reject it in every particular instance, where such communications are spoken of as received or expected. We cannot but express our astonishment at their inconsistency, if they profess to form their sentiments from the Bible; and if they will not be determined by that infallible arbiter, we can have no argument with them upon this subject.

It must remain for us to state in a subsequent essay, on what grounds we maintain the doctrine of divine influence: for the present we may take notice of certain prevailing objections.

1. It is said to be absurd; and many opprobrious epithets are affixed to the names of its zealous advocates, by those who proudly and invidiously term their own party, **THE RATIONAL DIVINES**, as if “they were the people, and wisdom should die with them†.” These men

* John xvi. 13, 14.

† Job xii. 2.

contend for a religion, in which nothing more is requisite than the light and strength of our depraved nature. To such persons we allow that the representation we have given of Christianity must be offensive, and we wonder not that they turn from it with disgust. We need not be solicitous about their approbation, for their judgment is under a dangerous bias. Their pride of heart must be subdued, before the doctrine can appear reasonable to them. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned*." We are not pleading in defence of the wild reveries of a heated or a deranged imagination: we wish to support our system by solid arguments. But we dare not reject the clear and unequivocal declarations of the word of God, merely because some men count them foolish: and we are confident, that, if reason itself were fairly appealed to, her decision would be on our side. For where, we may ask, where is the absurdity of supposing, that He who formed the mind can have access to it, and regulate its faculties and operations by his powerful influence? Or why should it be thought strange and ridiculous, that the God of mercy should afford us that special aid of his Spirit, which in our miserable case is so desirable?

* 1 Cor. ii. 14.

2. It is said to be unnecessary. Yet how strange is this position in such a state of things, as the world now exhibits! For is man indeed so improved in wisdom and goodness, that he wants no further assistance either for the knowledge or performance of his duty? Alas! we have the most deplorable experience to the contrary. Let the condition and character of man be seriously considered; and then the grace of the Holy Ghost will be seen to be indispensably requisite and inestimably precious. To those, who have paid a minute attention to the strong propensities of their nature, and have laboured in vain by their own strength to correct every wrong bias, it must appear a comfortless doctrine indeed, to be assured that all must depend on their own exertions, and that no help is or can be afforded them from heaven. It is vainly argued, that if men properly employed and improved their faculties as they might, nothing more would be wanted. For the truth of the case is, that they do not, and of themselves never will, make the necessary exertions for the performance of their duty. We object not to any proper attempts to rouse them by the strongest remonstrances and most pressing exhortations, that they may use the faculties, which God has given them: but that they may be encouraged to action, let the gracious proposals of the Spirit's aid be continually set before them. We would say therefore

to every individual, "Arise, and be doing, and the Lord be with thee *." But

3. It is said to be dangerous. It is supposed that this doctrine of divine influences tends to fill men's minds with various conceits of their own importance, and may lead them to the most fatal delusions. What the abuse of it may be, we will not determine; but the contrary effect may rather be expected. That there are many false pretences to the assistance of the Spirit, does not disprove the reality of his agency in every case. There were false prophets of old; but were none therefore inspired of the Lord? There were some, "who said they were Apostles, and were not †;" but shall we affirm that all the Twelve were impostors? There may be much counterfeit money in circulation; but has there been no true coinage?

Still it is thought, this expectation of the Spirit's influence will lead to the neglect of our own endeavours. But the objection is not well grounded. He works upon men in a manner suitable to their nature, as they are rational and free agents. He inclines their will, disposes them to the love of holiness, from a view of its excellency, and excites them to diligence in duty by the offer of his help. This forms their strongest encouragement to exert themselves: a powerful assistant is at hand. "Work out your own salvation with fear and

* 1 Chron. xxii. 16.

† Rev. ii. 2.

trembling; for it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure *.” If any will foolishly argue, that their efforts are needless, because “their sufficiency is of God,” they understand not their own principles; and their indolence arises, not from their dependence on the Spirit, but from their dislike of God’s service, which will be their condemnation.

The doctrine truly understood, and sincerely embraced, will produce the contrary effects: and we are confident that undeniable facts will justify the assertion. If however we appeal to the characters of those, who have professed to rely on the grace of the Spirit, it is necessary that we should make all candid allowances for infirmities and imperfections in the best, and expect to find among them a mixture of false pretenders. With these cautions let us institute the enquiry, and form our judgment. Who, then, either in former or in present times, have been most diligent and exemplary in the practice of every moral and religious duty? Who have been most humble, holy, and heavenly-minded? Have they not been among the advocates for this doctrine? And on the contrary have not the contemptuous scoffers been always lax in their notions of moral obligation, afraid of any strictness or zealous exertions in religion, and ready to justify the free gratification of their appetites? It is not to be wondered

* Phil. ii. 12, 13.

at, that two such characters are united in St. Jude's description, or that those are "sensual," who "have not the Spirit*." These surely do not recommend to our notice their theological system, whatever it may be. We shall be most disposed to adopt the sentiments of those persons, who appear, in their lives and tempers, to possess an uniform, fervent, devout, and practical regard to God: for their holy and exemplary conduct will plead most powerfully in their favour.

* Jude 19.

ESSAY XXXIV.

ON THE INFLUENCES AND OPERATIONS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

PART II.

The assistance of the Holy Spirit may be expected, because—it was predicted in the old testament,—it was the special promise of Christ to his church,—it is the peculiar privilege of the gospel,—it is described as essential to all true religion,—and all, who are destitute of this grace, are in a state of condemnation.

THOUGH it be allowed, that many passages in the sacred writings speak in express terms of the existence and operations of the Holy Spirit, it should seem that some persons with great study and display of ingenuity have now discovered that he exerts no influence in the present day; that we have no right to expect, and that we have no need of, his assistance. Presumptuous men ! On what authority are your confident assertions grounded ? We dare not credit you in opposition to the plainest and most explicit declarations of the word of God. We dare not “ make him a

lar," or endeavour to explain away the meaning of his infallible testimony by any low subtleties or forced interpretations. We will not relinquish the pleasing hope of those spiritual aids, which we feel to be necessary; and you must excuse us from following your conceits to the risk of our salvation. Allow us to form our own conclusions, while we make our appeal "to the law and to the testimony."

We have taken a brief survey of the operations of the Spirit in former times, and have seen that the government of the church and of the world itself has been administered, in a great degree at least, under his influence. Now, where are we taught that this influence is withdrawn? Why may we not believe, that the courage of some men on the field of battle, the wisdom of others in the council, and useful inventions in society, still proceed from him? Why not suppose, that he reproves and strives with sinners among ourselves, and restrains their wickedness by strong impressions of conviction and terror upon their minds?

We admit, that there is no evidence of miraculous powers in our day; nor do we perceive any necessity for them. Much is said of them in the new testament; and this might be expected, as they were given in so large a measure to the primitive church, and formed so considerable a part of the divine attestation of the gospel. But

we shall find that there are other operations of the Holy Ghost spoken of throughout all the scriptures, perfectly distinct from the miraculous, granted for different purposes, and, though less splendid, far more valuable to the possessors. Many have prophesied in the name of Christ, cast out devils, and done many wonderful works, whom yet he never knew, and who will for ever be excluded from his presence*. Those gifts, therefore, as they are not now wanted, and could in no degree promote our salvation, are not to be desired. But let us “covet earnestly the best gifts†,” the gracious communications of the Spirit, by which our depraved faculties may be restored, and our souls so renewed, that we may be effectually brought to the knowledge, love, service, and enjoyment of God. Our situation renders such assistance most devoutly to be wished for; and that we may confidently ask and expect it, we infer from the following considerations.

I. It was predicted in the old testament. Every thing good and holy, which has ever appeared in fallen man, is in those scriptures ascribed to the agency of the Spirit. But it was promised, that a more plentiful effusion of his grace, than had been known in former times, should be reserved for the Christian dispensation, not solely

* Matt. vii. 22, 23.

† 1 Cor. xii. 31.

or principally for miraculous purposes, but for the promotion of real religion in truth and holiness. Thus saith the Lord, when describing his plan of mercy for sinners, and the influences of that grace designed to be communicated to them through the Saviour, "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground : I will pour MY SPIRIT upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring *." And the effect of this is declared to be no other, than to produce an unfeigned devotedness to the service of God. Who shall presume to say, that the promise is vacated, or hath long ago received its full completion ?

The continuance of the Holy Ghost with the church of Christ, even to the end of time, is secured by the most solemn engagements, made with our exalted Head and all his faithful followers. For thus saith the Father to the Son undertaking for us, "As for Me, this is my covenant with them: MY SPIRIT that is upon Thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, FROM HENCEFORTH AND FOR EVER †." The Spirit and the word of God, we perceive, are equally necessary, and both must remain with the church, till the great plan of Redemption be finished.

* Isa. xliv. 3.

† Isa. lix. 21.

Whenever a revival of the cause of truth and righteousness is spoken of, when the subject of prophecy is the recovery of sinners to God, or the enlargement and prosperity of the Christian church, the Holy Spirit is constantly introduced as the grand agent; and the descriptions are such as to justify our inference, that by him alone fallen man can be induced or enabled, in any age or in any circumstances, to enter upon and persevere in the service of Almighty God. Thus saith the Lord,—“ I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them*.”—“ Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit†.”—“ I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplications, and they shall look upon Me, whom they have pierced ‡.” According to these scriptures, repentance, faith, and holiness, are to be produced only by a divine influence, which must therefore be essentially requisite in the present day.

The two principal subjects of promise and of prophecy are, the coming of Christ, and the effusion of the Spirit. The old testament speaks chiefly of the former; but, Christ having appeared, the new testament treats more largely of the latter. And hence we are led to remark,

* Ezek. xxxvi. 27. † Zech. iv. 6. ‡ Zech. xii. 10.

II. It was the especial promise of Christ before he left the world ; and his language is such as to encourage the expectation of the same gracious assistance to the end of time. “ If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him * ? ” Jesus stood and cried to a large and mixed assembly, “ If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink : he that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive †. We ask then, Has our heavenly Father ceased to care for his children, or to bestow his blessing on those who call upon him ? Is “ the fountain of life ” dried up, or doth it emit no such streams as it once did ?

In our Lord’s last solemn address to his disciples, who were dreading his departure from them, he suggested to them for their consolation, that his place would be supplied, and his gracious purposes carried on, by the continual presence and effectual working of the Holy Ghost. On this consideration above all others he grounded his exhortations to them, and his expressions clearly shew, that the promise was intended, not for them only as individuals, but for the benefit

* Luke xi. 13.

† John vii. 37, 38.

of his church in all ages. “ I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another comforter, that he may ABIDE WITH YOU FOR EVER; even the Spirit of truth.—And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment*.” “ THE WORLD” is too extensive a term, in whatever sense we understand it, to be confined to the Apostles, or even to the Christians of their day; and the whole passage amounts to an engagement on the part of Christ, to support his faithful people at all times, and to bring men to the knowledge and experience of his salvation, by the energy of the Holy Ghost, who alone can effect it. For others, as well as for them to whom he then spoke, he was tenderly solicitous; and therefore, in his fervent intercession with the Father, he said, “ Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word †.”

To others likewise, and not to his primitive disciples only, he promised his gracious presence and assistance: “ Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them ‡.” And again in terms the most explicit, as he quitted the earth, he declared, “ Lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world §.” Now, we ask,

* John xiv. 16, 17. xvi. 8.

† John xvii. 20.

‡ Matt. xviii. 20.

§ Matt. xxviii. 20.

How does he fulfil these engagements, but by the Holy Ghost, through whose influence alone he is ever present with his people? Or shall we for a moment allow, that this influence is withdrawn? If it be so, (we speak it with horror) he has falsified his word, and deserted his church. But we proceed to remark, with a reference to the aid of the Spirit,

III. It is the peculiar privilege of the gospel. This dispensation of light and mercy is described and distinguished by the very circumstance we are now considering, that under it an abundant effusion of grace is vouchsafed, and may be confidently expected. The preachers of Christianity are therefore discriminated as “ministers—not of the letter but of the Spirit,” because this divine agent is engaged to accompany their doctrine with his efficacious operation, that it may not prove a mere empty sound, but give life to the hearers. And on the same account the gospel itself is called “the ministration of the Spirit*.” But if we are to expect no such communications from heaven, our religion has lost its main excellency, and its most glorious distinction; it has degenerated into a speculative system and a dead letter. The gospel proposes invaluable privileges to believers, which no man better understood, or has more clearly described

* 2 Cor. iii. 6, 8.

than St. Paul. But he seems to include them all in this one expression,—"that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith*." Take away this blessing, then, and what is left us? The whole becomes unmeaning or inefficacious.

The new testament invariably speaks of its ministers as commissioned and qualified for their office by the Spirit, and as being indebted for all their support and success to his mighty influence†. The church of England has instituted its solemn services upon the same idea. She therefore calls upon all, who are presented for ordination, to declare, "they trust that they are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon them this office and ministration:" and she teaches us to pray, that God would "send down upon our bishops and curates, and all congregations committed to their charge, the healthful Spirit of his grace." But now, it should seem, we have learnt that all this is unnecessary, or a presumptuous expectation; and men dare to intrude into the sacred function, and to go through its customary duties, at the same time that they cast off all regard to the Holy Ghost. Alas! what have we gained by this new doctrine? Are the ordinances of religion administered in a more devout manner, or with greater effect? May we not fear, lest this insulted Spirit, whose influences

* Gal. iii. 14.

† Acts xx. 28. Eph. iv. 11. 1 Thess. i. 5.

are discarded, should indeed withdraw himself from us, and give us up to the most deplorable darkness? Before he take his flight, let us pray, that he would revive our churches with all his quickening powers, that he would raise up faithful pastors, and give such energy to their word, that they may turn many to righteousness. What a blessed change might yet be produced among us by his gracious interposition!

IV. It is described as essential to all true religion. Every good gift, every holy temper, every excellent work, is attributed to his agency upon the human mind. What then remains of real solid worth, if we expunge this article from our creed? How dangerous, how destructive to the interests of Christianity, must that system be, which confines the Spirit's influence to the mere external declaration of his will by the scriptures, and denies his internal operations! For, though the Bible be his word, and he make much use of it in carrying on his great design, yet without the exertion of his energy in the soul, there is no vital principle, no light or life, no reconciliation or communion with God, no enjoyment of his love, or suitable qualification for his kingdom. There is no saving benefit to be derived from our religion, no happiness to be experienced in it, but what proceeds from this one source. This will be more minutely discussed hereafter;

but for the present we offer the following remarks in a brief manner.

It is the Holy Ghost who alone enables us to discern the doctrines of revelation, so as to perceive their justness and excellency, admit them with sincerity, and feel their efficacy. He is “the Spirit of truth,” because he guides us into it;—“the Spirit of wisdom,” by whom we obtain the knowledge of Christ, and of the hope of our calling *. Man, therefore, without the Spirit is represented as foolish, ignorant of God, blind, and in a state of gross darkness. He is so though his understanding be cultivated, and his rational powers improved; nay, though he may be favoured with an evangelical ministry, and study the scriptures with all the advantages of human learning, yet, if not enlightened by the Spirit, he is still “a natural man:”—“he receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God;”—“neither can he know them †.”

The same divine agency is necessary, in order to produce that faith in the heart, to which the promises are made. We are of ourselves unwilling to yield an unfeigned subjection to the Lord Christ, and to fix our whole dependence upon him. Nothing but the grace of God will ever remove our objections and overcome our oppo-

* John xvi. 13. Eph. i. 17, 18. † 1 Cor. ii. 14.

sition : without this grace therefore, whatever may be our professed system of religion, we shall remain in a state of unbelief, averse to the appointed method of salvation, and, of course, destitute of its blessings. Such appears the obvious sense of these awful declarations, “ No man can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me, draw him ;” and, “ No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost *.”

All real holiness, and all acceptable obedience to God, must proceed from the same source. Possibly, men may possess amiable dispositions as members of society, may assume a semblance of piety, and perform many duties, as far as the external action goes, for which they may be highly esteemed. But “ the carnal mind is enmity against God ; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God †.” It is only by the-work of the Spirit in regeneration that this alienation of the heart from God will be removed, right principles implanted, and the affections brought under proper regulation. This is that beginning of the spiritual life, without which no good works can be done ; and a continuance of the same gracious communications is necessary to a steadfast perseverance in holiness, or to the acceptable performance of any

* John vi. 44. 1 Cor. xii. 3.

† Rom. viii. 7. 8.

particular duty. Thus we learn, that they only “that are after the Spirit do mind the things of the Spirit;” and “through the Spirit they mortify the deeds of the body.” “They know not what they should pray for as they ought, but the Spirit helpeth their infirmities*.” “Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, they are changed into the same image, from glory to glory;” but this is effected “by the Spirit of the Lord†.” Though the same influence they love and pursue whatever is excellent and praiseworthy: “for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth‡.” In short, whatever attainments they make in virtue or religion, if their lives be most useful, and their holiness most eminent, the reason is, they are “elect—through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience§.”

The scriptures speak in lofty terms of the happiness to be experienced in the service of God. But this happiness must spring, in a great measure at least, from a sense of his love, and cannot be procured or maintained without the gracious agency of the Spirit. He only can give us access to God with confidence, dispersing our fears, inspiring us with hope of his favour, and enabling us to walk in sweet fellowship with him.

* Rom. viii. 5, 13, 26.

† 2 Cor. iii. 18.

‡ Eph. v. 9.

§ 1 Pet. i. 2.

Believers under this influence are carried above all their trials, and participate of a felicity too exalted to be described. Then they can adopt these triumphant and grateful declarations; “Hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us *.”—“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ †.” And, while exulting in their own privileges, they will pray with compassionate regard for others, “The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost ‡.”

The same efficacious influence, which produces in Christians such strong consolation, prepares them for the complete fruition of the heavenly glory. “Through the Spirit they wait for the hope of righteousness by faith §;” and they gradually become more and more meet for the inheritance, which is reserved for them. Though they stand complete before God in the righteousness of their Saviour, yet as to the state and temper of their own minds, there must be a suitableness and qualification, or else they will never relish either the company or the employments of

* Rom. v. 5.

† Rom. viii. 16, 17.

‡ Rom. xv. 13.

§ Gal. v. 5.

“the high and holy place.” There must be an entire conformity to the mind and will of God: and this is, not what their own resolutions or exertions, but what his effectual grace, will accomplish in them. While therefore they are exulting in the prospect of that glory which is shortly to be revealed in them, and “willing rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord,” they will all devoutly acknowledge, “He that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit *.”

Such was the religion of the new testament, such was primitive Christianity; and it is obvious that the doctrine of divine influences pervaded the whole system. Is this doctrine, then, to be abandoned in our day; or are those things which are necessarily connected with it, peculiar to any age? Do not we stand in need of those spiritual blessings, and of the same assistance for the attainment of them, as much as the first Christians did? Then, let us not relinquish our hope, or listen to those who would rob us of our most valuable privileges. Let us hold fast our profession in this important article, and while we bless God for the gracious provision He has made for our wants, let us pray, that we may be “sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which

* 2 Cor. v. 5, 8.

is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory * !"—It remains only that we observe,

V. All, who are destitute of his sacred influences, are in a state of condemnation. This tremendous position is an obvious deduction from the preceding consideration. For, is it so, that there can exist no true religion but "through the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ?" Then it follows, that without it we cannot be the objects of divine regard. It is declared in the most explicit terms, "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his †." Of this plain sentence we cannot well mistake the meaning, or be indifferent about the consequence. If we have not the Spirit, whatever else we may possess or boast of, we "have neither part nor lot" in the blessings of redemption: the Saviour disowns us, and in such a state we cannot be admitted into his kingdom. The inference is full of horror, but it forces itself upon us; that if we relinquish our expectation of all spiritual aid, we must relinquish our hopes of heaven.

Some perhaps may attempt to evade this argument, by maintaining "that the Spirit of Christ," of which St. Paul speaks, is the temper or disposition of Christ, which is allowed to be ne-

* Eph. i. 13, 14.

† Rom. viii. 9.

cessary. But it is a mean subterfuge: for even that conformity of temper is such as no man can attain, but “by the renewing of the Holy Ghost.” And it is not true, that this is the Apostle’s meaning, as the whole context evinces: for he there treats of the divine agent, through whom, as he observes, and not by any pious disposition of our own, “we mortify the deeds of the body*.”

Or is it thought, that the alarming sentence is too severe? Be it remembered, that those, who “have not the Spirit of Christ,” are living under the influence of the vilest affections, and in subserviency to that malignant fiend, who is the avowed enemy of God and of all righteousness. For he is “the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience†.” Besides, if it be so, that God “will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him‡,” men will be condemned for their contemptuous refusals of his grace. It is a sufficient charge against them, and one which they cannot refute,—“Ye have not, because ye ask not§:” and no other reason can be assigned for their neglecting to pray for the promised blessing, but that they disdain the assistance of the Spirit, and hate that service to which he calls them. It will therefore be a righteous thing with God to

* Rom. viii. 13.

† Eph. ii. 2.

‡ Luke xi. 13.

§ James iv. 2.

exclude them from heaven. If we would avoid this doom, we must yield ourselves without reserve to his guidance and disposal, and say from the heart, "Cast us not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from us *!"

* Psalm li. 11.

ESSAY XXXV.

ON THE ILLUMINATION OF THE SPIRIT.

PART I.

The assistance of the Spirit is adapted to our necessities. His illumination of the understanding is proved—from many express promises—from the prayers offered up for it—and from the general description given of true believers.

VARIOUS arguments have been proposed, in order to justify our expectations of assistance from the Holy Spirit. It may be useful to enter into a more minute consideration of the nature of his agency upon the human mind, and take a distinct survey of his various operations. His great design is to recover man from his apostate condition, and by a renovation of the soul to repair the mischief of the original transgression. And as it was in the primary formation of all things, so it is in this new and spiritual creation, LIGHT is first produced. This is indeed closely and inseparably connected with other parts of his work, but it seems proper to give it the precedence in

our enquiries and in the adjustment of our system.

We shall see, through the whole process, how exactly his gracious influences are adapted to remove or alleviate our necessities. Are we in ignorance of God? It is the office of the Spirit to illuminate the understanding. Are we depraved? He regenerates and sanctifies the soul. Are we weak and helpless? He is ready to strengthen and invigorate us by his mighty energy "in the inner man." Are we fearful or disconsolate? He is at hand to communicate peace and consolation.

Our object is to state from the scriptures the effects produced by his agency, and not to explain the mode in which his operations are performed: and it is of more consequence surely to know, WHAT he does, than HOW he acts. If our minds be brought under his entire influence, we need not be solicitous as to the particular manner, in which he bestows his grace. We are willing to allow, that he proceeds in a mysterious way, and yet we maintain that his interposition, as for other purposes, so for assisting our conceptions, and giving us a discernment in divine things, not otherwise to be acquired, is unequivocally declared. The understanding, like all the other faculties of man, has suffered by the fall, and it belongs to the Holy Spirit to repair the loss. It is not enough that he has made an

external revelation of the will of God in his written word: the fact is, as we are there assured, that no man does attain to that knowledge of it, which alone will be efficacious to his salvation, whose mind is not first illuminated by the Holy Ghost.

Such is the topic now to be discussed. Our position is, that those, who humbly seek the gracious aids of the Spirit, receive an infusion of intellectual light, by which they have perceptions of divine truth, not only clearer and more distinct, but of a different nature and more excellent, than any with which they could have been previously furnished. Persons so favoured possess a wisdom and knowledge, superior to what others do, which no natural abilities or efforts of diligence, no instructions by books or men, of themselves, ever could have given them. All this is denied and virulently opposed: it is often treated with contemptuous and profane derision. Some, upon whose admired talents or acquirements this doctrine is thought to bear hard, are exasperated by it; and when pressed, even as the most illiterate, “to become fools that they may be wise,” exclaim with indignation like the Pharisees of old, “Are we blind also *?” It may be proper therefore to produce proofs in support of our opinion. We shall select some at least out of that abun-

* John ix. 40.

dance, with which the holy scriptures supply us. For throughout the sacred volume, this work of the Spirit in the illumination of the human mind is most unequivocally declared, and represented to us in a variety of images. Let us be solicitous, not merely to discuss the subject in the way of argument, but, if convinced of its reality, to participate the blessing, of which we are enquiring.

I. The Lord God, by the most express and gracious promises, engages to bestow it. Thus by his servant David he assures us, “ Good and upright is the Lord : therefore will he teach sinners in the way. The meek will he guide in judgment : and the meek will he teach his way.—The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him : and he will shew them his covenant *.”

He addresses us by Solomon, “ Turn ye at my reproof ; behold, I will pour out my Spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you.—For the Lord giveth wisdom : out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.—Trust in the Lord with all thine heart ; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him ; and he shall direct thy paths †.”

By the prophet Isaiah that gracious assurance is given to the Church of Christ, “ All thy children shall be taught of the Lord ‡.” And this our Lord himself quotes, confirms, and illus-

* Psalm xxv. 8, 9, 14.

† Prov. i. 23. ii. 6. iii. 5, 6.

‡ Isaiah liv. 13.

trates, observing that it is only by divine teaching that any one truly understands his character or accepts his salvation: "Every man that hath heard and hath learned of the Father cometh unto me*." It is not enough to hear the words of Christ, we must also learn their true and spiritual import from the Father: in consequence of which, not before, we shall submit to the Redeemer.

In describing the blessings of the new covenant by Jeremiah, the Lord promises to bestow upon his people such an enlightened judgment, particularly in the nature and excellency of his law, as should be far superior to all human instruction, and such as cannot be derived from the information of others. "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts.—And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord†."

The Saviour is compared to the bright luminary in the firmament; and it is implied in the similitude, that as no material object is distinctly perceived by the eye of the body, without the sun's irradiating beams, so Christ illuminates the mind of those who receive him, and they alone have any spiritual perception of his revealed

* John vi. 45.

† Jer. xxxi. 33; 34.

truth. To others it may be declared; but “having eyes they see not.” He came therefore, “to open the blind eyes*,” and he is “the day-spring from on high, which hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace†.” Thus he speaks of himself, “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life‡.” It is a strong metaphor, we allow: but it justifies the conclusion we would draw, and the expectation we would encourage, that the sincere believer shall receive in his understanding a spiritual irradiation, of which others are entirely destitute. There are various declarations to the same purpose, that the man of upright heart shall be assisted in his religious enquiries, and in his conceptions and judgment of divine truth be delivered from those difficulties, by which persons of a different description are often embarrassed and confounded. “To him that ordereth his conversation aright, will I shew the salvation of God§.” “If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God||.” “Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes**.” “It is given unto You to

* Isa. xlii. 7.

† Luke i. 78, 79.

‡ John viii. 12.

§ Psalm l. 23.

|| John vii. 17.

** Matt. xi. 25.

know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to Them it is not given *."

It is described by our Lord as the peculiar office of the Holy Spirit, that, in bringing men to the obedience of faith, "He will reprove (or convince) the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment †." Now, in whatever sense we interpret the words, it seems absolutely requisite, that the understanding be informed and the errors of the mind detected, in order to reprove or convince with any effect: and this influence is to be extended to "the world," which must comprise not the apostles or the primitive times only, but all ages and generations.

It is mere quibbling to say, that all these expressions, and whatever else is spoken of a divine teaching, may be explained of the Spirit's agency upon the affections, without supposing that he illuminates the mind. We deny that they can be so applied with any fairness or propriety. This mode of interpretation is most dictatorial and unauthorized, and tends to confound the meaning of language. It is impossible for words to be more explicit, than are these declarations, that God is graciously pleased to communicate his aid to the understanding, as well as to the other faculties of the soul. Such intellectual aid is clearly and unequivocally promised in the

* Matt. xiii. 11.

† John xvi. 8.

passages here quoted, if we take them in the plain and common acceptation; and we are not justified by any rules of sound criticism in expounding them otherwise.

II. We are taught to pray for it. This at least has been the practice of the best and wisest men. Petitions for a spiritual illumination run throughout the psalms of David. Such were the devout breathings of his soul: "Shew me thy ways, O Lord, teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth, and teach me."—"Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law. Make me to understand the way of thy precepts. Teach me thy statutes."—"Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk. Teach me to do thy will, for thou art my God: thy Spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness*." Is it possible to prove by any fair or candid interpretation, that David had no desire or expectation of assistance to be given him, for the discovery or clearer perception of divine truth? Or who shall presume to say, that such prayers are not equally suitable and expedient for us?

To the same purpose were the fervent supplications of Solomon offered up; and he has taught us that a spiritual understanding is to be obtained, not by the exercise or improvement of unassisted,

* Psalm xxv. 4, 5. cxix. 18, 27, 64. cxliii. 8, 10.

reason, not solely by serious attention to instruction, or by the most sincere and diligent investigation, but by incessant and importunate cries to heaven*. Surely, these directions were meant to be extended unto us.

For the christian converts at Ephesus the apostle of the Gentiles prayed, “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, would give unto them the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, in the knowledge of Him; the eyes of their understanding being enlightened, that they might know what is the hope of his calling:” for those at Philippi, “that their love might abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment:” and for those at Colosse, “that they might be filled with the knowledge of God’s will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding †.” Now, can any one, whose intellect is not sophisticated, entertain a doubt, that St. Paul considered the influence of the Holy Ghost as absolutely necessary, not only to excite pure affections, but previously, and even in order to them, to communicate right perceptions of God’s revealed truth, and that this was the blessing, which he implored for Christians every where?

Such are the examples proposed to us; and such we need not be afraid to imitate. If any scruple remained, the exhortation of St. James is

* 1 Kings iii. 9. Prov. ii. 1—6.

† Eph. i. 17, 18. Phil. i. 9. Col. i. 9.

calculated to remove it: and this alone would be decisive. “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not: and it shall be given him*.” But if prayer be requisite for the attainment of true understanding, we infer that other means are insufficient of themselves. If nothing more be wanted than the exertion of our natural powers, we should be urged to improve those abilities, and not tempt God by requesting his interposition, where our own diligence might answer the purpose. And all such petitions would be highly presumptuous, if we had no reason to expect any communication of intellectual light.

It may not be improper to remark, that the Church of England has taught all her members to pray for this very blessing. It would be the grossest perversion of language, to say that these supplications, in which we are required to join, have no reference whatever to the understanding, or that they do not imply any expectation of mental assistance.—“That it may please thee to illuminate all Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, with true knowledge and understanding of thy word†.” —“Grant that thy people may both perceive and know what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil the same‡.” —“Grant us by the same Spirit to have

* James i. 5.

† Litany.

‡ Collect for first Sunday after Epiphany.

a right judgment in all things *.”—How can we be sincere or consistent in adopting or assenting to these petitions, unless we admit the doctrine of a spiritual illumination? And, if we allow its necessity, why are we not more importunate in our secret addresses to the throne of grace, that we may know it by experience?

III. It is the general description and the peculiar discrimination of true believers, that they are favoured with it. They are spoken of throughout the scriptures as possessing an appropriate wisdom and knowledge of divine things, which they derive from God alone: “the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding †.” However mean their abilities or attainments may be in other respects, they only are denominated “wise;” they only “know the Lord.” This, we are assured, is effected by the secret manifestation of the divine glory, or by the infusion of light into their minds, without which they would never discern the character of God, or the excellency of his revealed truth. “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in their hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ ‡.” They “have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus §.” They “were sometimes darkness, but are now light in the Lord ||.”

* Collect for Whitsunday.

† Job xxxii. 8.

‡ 2 Cor. iv. 6.

§ Eph. iv. 21.

|| Eph. v. 8.

Being restored by the Spirit to the divine image, in which Adam was first created, and which he lost by his apostasy, they are “renewed in knowledge,” as well as “in righteousness and true holiness*.” It is mentioned as the most distinguished mark of kindness, which they have received from their God and Saviour, that “He hath called them out of darkness into his marvellous light †.” They “have an unction from the Holy One;”—and “the same anointing teacheth them of all things, and is truth, and no lie ‡.” They can say, therefore, in the review of that change which has passed upon their minds, “We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true §.”

All others, whatever may be their advantages of intellect, education, or study, are described as “a people of no understanding” in divine things. Thus the sons of Eli, though instructed in all the externals of revelation, and admitted to the sacred function of the priesthood, “knew not the Lord ||: and of all the Jewish rabbies, who boasted so much of their learning and sanctity, our Saviour testified, that they knew not that God, whom they professed to worship **. St. Paul’s declaration to this purpose, so often

* Eph. iv. 24. Col. iii. 10.

† 1 Peter ii. 9.

‡ 1 John ii. 20, 27.

§ 1 John v. 20.

|| 1 Sam. ii. 12.

** John vii. 28.

quoted, is most decisive: "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned*." The apostle's design, evidently, was to shew the entire necessity of the assistance of the Holy Ghost, without which all the gracious provision made for us in the gospel will be of no avail: we shall not even understand "the things which God hath prepared for them that love him," and "that are freely given to us of God†." These are "the things of the Spirit," not only because he first revealed them to prophets and apostles, but because he alone can communicate just perceptions of them: "they are spiritually discerned."—"The natural man" is any one, who possesses not the Spirit; and whatever may be his character in other respects, he cannot be a competent judge of these subjects. He stands in need of better aid, than what he can derive from his corrupt nature in its most favoured circumstances, in order to form right conclusions concerning them. He is indisposed to admit the truths proposed to him; and more than this, he sees no beauty or consistency in them, and therefore treats them as absurd; nor can this ignorance of them be removed, but by the teaching of the Holy Ghost. Such appears the obvious import of the apostle's

* 1 Cor. ii, 14.

† 1 Cor. ii, 9, 12.

words; and, however they may be strained and perverted by the subtleties of criticism, they can never be made consistent with the opinion of those, who deny the influence of the Spirit upon the understanding.

It is supposed by many, that good sense, diligence, and learning, are all that can be wanted to give any man that knowledge of the scriptures, which is requisite for his salvation, and the idea of any other assistance is discarded as absurd in the extreme. But the foregoing observations evince, that the sacred writers thought otherwise, and firmly believed, that, however clearly they might declare the great doctrines of redemption, no persons ever did or could attain just views of them, without a divine illumination of their minds. They therefore taught men every where, not merely to yield a serious attention to their testimony, but to pray that “the Lord would give them understanding in all things*,” and to ascribe it to his gracious communications of light, if indeed they were brought to the true knowledge of their God and Saviour. This representation, we allow, is likely to be offensive to those, who boast of their erudition, and are proud of their intellect: but we conceive it to be scriptural; and it will become them, instead of cavilling at it, to go and learn what that meaneth, “If any man among you

* 2 Tim. ii. 7.

seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise : for the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God *.” Let them listen also to Him, who hath said, for a solemn warning to some and a merciful encouragement to others, “ For judgment I am come into this world ; that they, which see not, might see ; and that they which see might be made blind .†”

* 1 Cor. iii. 18, 19.

† John ix. 39.

ESSAY XXXVI.

ON THE ILLUMINATION OF THE SPIRIT.

PART II.

The Spirit teaches no new truths, but opens the understanding to understand the scriptures,—guides the humble, and not the self-sufficient—gives spiritual apprehensions, accompanied with, but distinct from, holy affections,—does not cherish pride, but the contrary,—does not render infallible, or teach all equally,—is often imperceptible in the beginning, and always gradual in the progress of his illumination.

IT might seem sufficient to state the positive proofs from scripture, in support of any doctrine. But sometimes the difficulty of the subject may give rise to various questions, which require serious consideration: and, though it be not necessary to reply to every caviller, there may be objections urged, which call for an explicit answer. We ought not indeed to relinquish any principle, merely because others oppose it; or to be staggered in our faith, though we should not

be able to satisfy their minds, or resolve all their enquiries. Where the point under examination is altogether a matter of revelation, it is enough for us to be convinced by declarations so clear as to exclude all doubt, that "thus it is written:" whatever arguments may be brought against it, originating merely from our ignorance or want of distinct conceptions, they should have no weight at all.

Testimonies in abundance have been produced from the sacred writers, to establish the doctrine of divine teaching, or the illumination of the understanding by the Holy Ghost. Yet, express and numerous as these testimonies are, many are unwilling to admit our conclusion; and they urge various difficulties, which they call upon us to remove, or else to renounce our faith. Now, though their questions be of such a sort, as not in the least to affect the validity of the proofs already exhibited, and though to some of them it may be improper or impossible to reply, we shall venture to make a few observations, which may confirm or elucidate the point. It is asked,

I. What does the Spirit teach? We pretend not to say, to what extent his assistance may be afforded: but it is of importance to remark, that in those ordinary communications, which we at this time are encouraged to expect from him, he reveals no new truth. He conveys no fresh information, which is not already contained in the

scriptures. The written word is a full declaration of the divine will; and by this test all our religious sentiments are to be tried. As the Spirit cannot contradict himself, it is not possible that any man can be taught by him what is repugnant to the Bible. Nay further, since that inspired book was intended to be a complete summary of truth, to which we are forbidden to add any thing, we can give no credit to any doctrines or principles, which are not evidently built on its authority, however their abettors may pretend to have received them immediately from heaven. Their boasts of revelation are to be treated, if not as the base attempts of impostors, yet as the wild reveries of enthusiasts.

Can we want any thing, then, in aid of the scriptures? Yes; we want the ability to perceive and know the things contained in them, at least to form spiritual apprehensions of them; and this ability the Holy Ghost only can supply. He removes the vail which has blinded our minds. We pray therefore, not that we may be wise above that which is written, or receive any such preternatural discoveries as may supersede the sacred records, but that He would "open our understandings, that we may understand the scriptures*." The teaching we desire of him, is not the declaration of any new message either by

* Luke xxiv. 45.

voice or vision, but the right knowledge of his word, which we cannot of ourselves attain. Be this our continual supplication, “O teach me thy statutes * !”

This representation of the doctrine condemns the extravagancy of those, who trust to their inward light, and are unwilling to be directed or controlled by the Bible. While we maintain the necessity of the Spirit’s illumination, we do not set aside the use of the means, which, as God’s appointments, are to be seriously attended and diligently improved. But, according to our view of the subject, we put the greatest honour upon them, as we seek and expect his gracious presence and assistance in them.

In the system of redemption the prominent parts are those, which relate to the righteous character and government of God: the authority, extent, and spirituality of his law; our own depravity, guilt, and condemnation; the excellency, power, and grace of Christ; the sufficiency of his atonement and obedience; the necessity and the beauty of holiness; and these we apprehend, are the principal points, in which the Holy Ghost teaches his people by his enlightening influences upon their minds. These at least are distinctly mentioned as matters of highest

* Psalm cxix. 12.

moment, in which a peculiar discernment is given them from above.

“The eternal power and Godhead” of our Creator may be so “understood by the things that are made, that they are without excuse,” who do not fear or serve him; yet by the light of reason alone in its most improved state men have never attained worthy notions of his character. In the judgment of the sacred writers “the world by wisdom knew not God *.” Nor is it sufficient that the Bible declares his perfections; but he himself “shines in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ †.” Of those therefore, who are so favoured, the Lord saith, “They shall all know ME ‡.”

He has given us a law: not only the indistinct intimations of his will by natural conscience, but the express and authoritative publication of his claims upon us and of our duty, in the ten commandments and throughout the sacred scriptures. But the equity, the goodness, the full extent, the holy demands, and tremendous sanctions of this law, none ever truly perceive but by a divine teaching. It is therefore the matter of promise in the new covenant, “I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts §.” If any one might have

* 1 Cor. i. 21.

† 2 Cor. iv. 6.

‡ Jer. xxxi. 34.

§ Jer. xxxi. 33.

been expected to understand it without a spiritual illumination, St. Paul before his conversion was likely to do so. He wanted not capacity or opportunities of instruction, and he studied the subject with diligence. Yet hear his confession, "I was alive WITHOUT THE LAW once*." Ignorance of his real condition was the consequence of his not knowing God or his precepts. "I had not known sin but by the law." And how was the change effected? "When the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.—We know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin." This was the result of divine teaching.

In like manner we are assured, that it is the Spirit's office to "reprove the world of sin †." Till he enlighten the understanding, men are not aware of their guilt and danger. They may speculate and debate about the depravity of human nature, but they have no proper conceptions of it. They may adopt general confessions of their corrupt state; but they see not, without the light of the Spirit, the extreme deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of the heart ‡. By his illumination such a discovery is made, of what they are and what they deserve, as will excite the most pungent anguish, and fill them with consternation. The description is, "I will put my Spirit within you:—Then shall ye remember

* Rom. vii. 7—9, 14.

† John xvi. 8.

‡ Jer. xvii. 9.

your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall lothe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations*.” Then, and then only, is true contrition experienced, and the careless sinner is constrained to cry out, “What must I do to be saved †?” Such is the invariable effect of the teaching of the Holy Ghost.

Is the penitent encouraged to fix and maintain his dependence upon the Saviour? This is in consequence of those views of the glory, power, grace, and righteousness of Christ, which the Spirit exhibits to the mind. For thus said our Lord, when describing the operations of this blessed agent, “He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you ‡.” And to prove the absolute necessity of such an influence, he declared, “No man can come unto me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him §.” But we are not drawn to the love and pursuit of any object, without a perception or persuasion of some value or advantage in it. Accordingly we pray for “the Spirit of wisdom and revelation,” that we may attain “the knowledge of Jesus Christ || :” and it is this discovery of his excellency, which lays the foundation for our faith, and hope, and peace.

* Ezek. xxxvi. 27, 31.

† Acts ii. 37. xvi. 30.

‡ John xvi. 14.

§ John vi. 44.

|| Eph. i. 17, 18.

Does the believer walk in holiness? It is to the light communicated to his understanding, as well as to the influence exerted upon his will and affections, that we ascribe this effect. The promise of our gracious God to his people is, "I will instruct thee, and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go*:" and if we can say with David, "I have not departed from thy judgments," we must add with him, "because Thou hast taught me†." It is only by a divine illumination of the mind, that our obligations to God and each other are truly discerned, that the reasonableness, the excellence, and extent of duty are discovered and acknowledged: and, though moralists may speak and write many fine things about benevolence and charity, to Christians alone it can be said, "Ye are taught of God to love one another‡."

It is no good objection to our representation, that we cannot assign the exact limits to this illumination of the understanding, or state precisely, how much in the attainment of our religious knowledge is to be ascribed to the exercise of our reason, and how much to the assistance of the Holy Spirit. The same objection might be urged against all his sacred influences whatever. But his agency may be efficacious, even where it cannot be minutely traced. It should satisfy us,

* Psalm xxxii. 8.

† Psalm cxix. 102.

‡ 1 Thess. iv. 9.

that we are encouraged to expect his aid in answer to prayer; and we should be willing to allow him all the credit of whatever spiritual discernment and purity of mind we may possess.

It is enquired,

2. Whom does the Spirit teach? We lament the magisterial air, which some assume, as if they had an exclusive right to decide all questions in religion, merely because they are men of an acute or improved intellect. To many such that sharp reproof might be addressed, "No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you *." Their ingenuity and their acquirements may give them great advantage in forming a judgment upon matters of mere human science, or even upon the external circumstances of a divine revelation. But if it be so, as we maintain, that there is an universal need of a spiritual illumination, in order "that we may know the things that are freely given to us of God," then the man of bright parts or of profound and extensive learning, has in this respect no superiority over others of his species, who seem so much below his level. Nay, perhaps, that precedence, which he claims, and which most persons are willing to yield to him, may prove a snare and a curse, being eventually the means of pre-

* Job xii. 2.

cluding him from the great blessing we are considering.

If we speak only of that appropriate influence, by which real Christians "are taught as the truth is in Jesus," we must remark, that though all men indiscriminately are enjoined to pray for it, and "God will give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him," yet there is not a more effectual obstruction to his admission, than a proud conceit of our own mental powers and the sufficiency of reason. The scholar and the philosopher may therefore "grope in the darkness without light," while others, very far inferior to them in natural abilities and attainments, may enjoy "the light of life." We say not this, with any view to the disparagement of human learning, which may be improved to the best account, but as a caution to those, who are in danger of valuing it too highly, and of arrogantly supposing that they want no other aid. "For God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble*."

According to this his usual procedure, we read that "not many wise men after the flesh are called; but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise†." An attentive observer of what passes in the world and in the church of Christ cannot but remark, that such a discrimination of characters has most frequently

* 1 Pet. v. 5.

† 1 Cor. i. 26, 27.

taken place; and he may be disposed to cry out, “Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world*?” The dispensation, though most awful, will finally redound to the glory of God. It is obvious, that He pours contempt on “that which is highly esteemed amongst men,” in order to prove that he wants no such aid for the support of his own cause, and “that our faith does not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God†.” Under this impression, it should seem, the Saviour exclaimed, in acknowledgment and admiration of the divine sovereignty, “I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight‡.”

It is a righteous thing with God to “reward the proud after their deserving:” yet he displays his grace, in that he is ready to afford the teaching of his Spirit to all who fervently implore of him “the wisdom that cometh from above.” None indeed will sincerely pray for it, but those who are convinced of and lament their own ignorance; and to such more especially the promises are made. “THE MEEK will he guide in

* 1 Cor. i. 20.

† 1 Cor. ii. 5.

‡ Matt. xi. 25, 26.

judgment: and THE MEEK will he teach his way *." But "if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know †."—Some are disposed to enquire,

3. Wherein does this spiritual wisdom differ from mere rational perceptions? A brief answer may be given: The Holy Ghost enables us to conceive of spiritual things in a spiritual manner, and exhibits to the mind the doctrines of revelation, not only as true, but as excellent. The convictions and impressions produced by his light, are very different from those, which are derived only from the deductions of reason. It is not possible by any explanation to convey to another, who has nothing more than natural powers however cultivated, any adequate idea of these spiritual apprehensions: for then we could not maintain our position, that they can be communicated no otherwise than by a divine influence. This circumstance therefore cannot disprove their reality; any more than our inability to make a man born blind comprehend the variety of colours, would disprove the existence of light.

The testimony of numerous and credible witnesses has usually been allowed as decisive evidence, in allegation of any matter of fact: and

* Psalm xxv. 9.

† 1 Cor. viii. 2.

the ignorance of others, who had not the same opportunity of observing, can form no valid objection. The same kind of evidence is to be produced in support of the doctrine before us : and this, in concurrence with the clear attestations of scripture, ought to have great weight. Many persons, whose intellect is neither deranged nor weak, and who are acknowledged to possess a solid judgment in common concerns, unite in declaring that they have received, in answer to prayer for divine teaching, such a perception of some leading truths revealed in the Bible, as is totally distinct from any which they before experienced. They seem to themselves to be brought into a new world, where every thing appears unlike what they had previously been acquainted with. The word of God, which they might have read, and studied, and understood grammatically, is now in their estimation a new and a far more glorious book ; and while they see its consistency and beauty, in a way they had never done before, they wonder at their former ignorance. Many doctrines, in the belief of which they might have been educated, and which possibly they might have maintained as theoretically true, now strike them with such a conviction, and in so different a point of view, that they cannot admit they had any prior knowledge of them ; and therefore they always speak of themselves as being “ called out of darkness into

marvellous light." The change of sentiment in some of them is very remarkable, as being more sudden and of public notoriety. Not a few have been constrained instantly to receive, defend, and admire those very principles, which they had denied, opposed, and hated; and they desire to speak it to the praise of their God and Saviour, "He hath opened mine eyes." Though pressed with one objection after another, each of them will persist in maintaining, "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see*." Why is their testimony to be discredited, or their experience to be scouted as the delusion of a wild or a heated imagination? Others, who have known nothing similar to this, instead of sneering at them, should rather suspect that all is not right with themselves, and earnestly pray, "That which I see not, teach thou me†."

It is argued by some zealous advocates for the honour of human reason, that the influence of the Spirit is confined to the affections, and has no concern whatever with the understanding; that all the passages of scripture, which speak upon this subject, are to be so explained. But surely, this is a most unfair and dogmatical interpretation, and such as would not be allowed in any other book. Are we at liberty to impose such an unusual acceptance of the words, "teach-

* John ix. 17, 25.

† Job. xxxiv. 32.

ing," "wisdom," "knowledge," &c. whenever they relate to the communications of the Spirit, as to say, that they have no reference to the intellect? Such criticism would never be admitted on any other subject; and it is evidently introduced, only to support a favourite hypothesis. The teaching of the Spirit, we grant, is always accompanied with a powerful energy to the heart: like the sun, it warms, as well as enlightens. On this account the two effects may be sometimes mentioned together; but they are perfectly distinct, and neither of them should be denied or overlooked. Or if there be texts, in which one alone of these effects is described, they ought not to be so explained as to set aside the other, which is no less plainly and explicitly declared. The illumination of the mind seems, in the order of our conceptions at least, most properly to precede the exercise of any holy affections: otherwise, our worship of God will not be a reasonable service. If the understanding be not first informed, we shall never pursue or desire the objects proposed to our choice, however excellent; as we shall see no good in them: or, in this case our religion, being founded in ignorance, will most probably lead to all the fooleries of enthusiasm, and terminate in total apostasy. This surely is not to be defended, as the most rational system.

We assert, and would strenuously maintain,

that no other teaching of the Spirit can be of any avail to our final salvation, but that which is attended with the sanctification of the heart. There is an illumination, we allow, of a less excellent kind, which is also ascribed to the Spirit, by which even the unregenerate may "know the way of righteousness," may have a striking conviction of the truth of any doctrine, and obtain in some measure a consistent view of the great scheme of redemption, as a matter of mere theory. This seems to have been the case with Simon Magus and some others, who are exhibited as a solemn warning to us, that we may not rest in speculation, but pray for that light which will transform the soul into the image of Christ *.

It is asked by some, who are afraid of dangerous consequences resulting from our doctrine,

4. Does not the notion of divine teaching tend to cherish pride and presumption? The apprehension, we believe, is perfectly unfounded; the contrary effect may rather be expected from it. For what is the doctrine but this, that we are by nature ignorant of God and totally void of all just perceptions in spiritual things, that we must derive all true and profitable wisdom from above, and that we must continually depend upon the Holy Spirit for his renewed communications to instruct and guide us? We are encouraged to

* Acts viii. 13. Heb. vi. 4. 2 Cor. iii. 18.

look for his influences only in the diligent and persevering use of all appointed means: "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord*." We are reminded, that in our highest state of advancement in knowledge, we are liable to many mistakes, that our views at best are obscure, and that as much darkness at all times remains in our understandings, so more especially may we be given up to extreme confusion and perplexity, if by our perverseness we provoke the Spirit to depart. Nothing can have a more salutary tendency to abase our pride. But we conceive that the objection may be urged with great force against the opposite system, which allows so much consequence to our unassisted reason.

Still it is said, that men, pretending to be taught of God, seem to set themselves up as infallible, and assert their opinions with a sort of authority, as if they had a claim to implicit belief and submission from others. We undertake not to vindicate the folly or the arrogance of any, who may misrepresent or abuse these principles. But those, who sincerely embrace them and are properly affected with them, will give no just occasion for these charges; though possibly they may speak with a degree of firmness and zeal, which their more cautious opponents may falsely ascribe to an overweening conceit of their own

* Hosea vi. 3.

superior wisdom. While they trust that "the eyes of their understanding are enlightened," they pretend not to be infallible, because they know that the Spirit is given to them "by measure *," and that his illumination of their minds is imperfect, as the work of sanctification also is, during the present life. They have received, it is true, communications from heaven, but these are designed chiefly for their private benefit. They presume not to say, that they are sent with any authoritative message to others, who have a right to demand from them testimonials of their divine commission, before they yield them an implicit confidence.

Yet it is alleged, that if they were taught of God, as "He is of one mind," their instructions would exactly coincide, and there could be no such contention or difference of sentiment among them, as we perceive in fact to subsist. We readily admit, that opinions directly contrary cannot be derived from one and the same divine influence: but as Christians are in various stages of advancement, and the wisest of them enjoy but a partial, defective light, it is no more wonderful, that they are as to some points of doctrine divided in judgment, than that they are not perfectly united in disposition. One "is a babe, and is unskilful in the word of righteous-

* John iii. 34.

ness, "whilst others " are of full age, and have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil*." Yet there is upon the whole a greater uniformity and harmony in their systems of faith, as to the grand and leading articles, than is commonly imagined. In all those things especially, which are necessarily connected with the divine life, such are the righteous character of God, the depravity of human nature, the evil of sin, the glory and grace of Christ, and the beauty of holiness,—here they are agreed, they are of one heart. And it is surprising, how exactly similar their confessions and their praises are, however different their mode of education, or the form of their ecclesiastical polity. Let them lay aside the peculiarities of their party, and converse only on those things, which relate to their spiritual welfare, and men of fervent piety will adopt nearly the same language; and language too, which seems perfectly mysterious to others. Now, if so great an union subsists among persons who are widely separated by external distinctions, professions, and ceremonies, how is it to be accounted for, but upon the supposition of their being under the influence of the same Teacher?

To one enquiry more a brief answer may be given. It is asked

5. Is this illumination of the understanding

* Heb. v. 13, 14.

instantaneous? Or is its progress so clearly marked, that it may be traced with exactness? We apprehend from the descriptions delivered in the Bible, that though there must be a moment, when light is first communicated to the soul, it may be so imperfect and confused for some time, that its commencement possibly may not be perceived, or the minute circumstances attending it be afterwards recollected. “The Sun of righteousness arises;” but, as it is with the bright luminary in the firmament, He comes not with the sudden burst of radiancy, which would overpower and confound us: his full manifestation is preceded by a faint and dubious light, which gradually increases, till the objects, to which our attention is directed, are rendered more distinctly visible, and at length assume a beauty and a lustre. Like as with the morning twilight, it is difficult, if not impossible, to state the very instant when the first ray breaks in upon us, after the gloom of midnight darkness, or to calculate precisely in the successive moments the quantity of additional light: yet the illumination is real, and in its progress becomes more and more manifest. “The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day *.”

* Prov. iv. 18.

It has been already intimated, that in some cases the change of views may be so sudden, and the infusion of light into the understanding so immediately perceptible, that the very hour and place, in which this divine communication was received, may be pointed out. Not only have persons grossly ignorant seemed, as it were in an instant, to be favoured with a considerable share of knowledge and discernment in divine things, but even scoffers and infidels, as we have remarked, have been at once compelled to believe, love, and vindicate the principles of Christianity; and even to “preach the faith, which they had destroyed *.” But these, we allow, are not the most usual modes of the Spirit’s operation, which is generally carried on in so gentle and gradual a way, that its beginning and increase cannot be traced with preciseness. Let us be satisfied and thankful, if with respect to ourselves it be marked by effects the most clear and undeniable.

It is the character of sincere Christians, that they advance in the spiritual life; and their progress in holiness is necessarily connected with, if it do not result from, more full and bright manifestations of the truth to their minds by the Holy Ghost. “If their love abounds yet more

* Gal. i. 23.

and more;" it is "in knowledge and in all judgment*." Additional light will be vouchsafed to those, who are simply dependent upon the Lord, devoted to him, and diligent in his service. But on the other hand the Spirit is grieved by declensions, or the indulgence of wrong tempers; and then it is no wonder, that he should suspend his communications of light, and that blindness and infatuation should succeed. How proper and forcible is the exhortation, "Walk as children of the light; and grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ †!"

The faithful followers of the Lamb may rejoice in the blessed prospect of a glorious and eternal day. Soon shall the vail, which at present obstructs or darkens their views, be entirely removed. "Now they see through a glass darkly, but then face to face, now they know in part, but then shall they know, even as also they are known ‡." "There shall be no night there, and they need no candle, neither light of the sun: for the Lord God giveth them light; and they shall reign for ever and ever §."—"The ungodly are not so:"—They may "walk in the light of their fire, and in the sparks that they

* Phil. i. 9.

† Eph. v. 8. 2 Pet. iii. 18.

‡ 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

§ Rev. xxii. 5.

have kindled :—but they shall lie down in sorrow *.”—“ Their light shall be dark, and their candle shall be put out †.” Because “ for them is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever ‡.”

* Isa. l. 11.

† Job. xviii. 6.

‡ Jude 13.

ESSAY XXXVII.

ON THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT IN REGENERATION.

PART I.

Christians are described as renewed in their minds.

Of this change consider—The nature—The author—And the means, by which it is usually effected: such are—the word of God—the ministry—and prayer.

THE Holy Spirit is the author of all those internal operations in the soul, which are requisite for the recovery of our fallen, depraved race. He interposes his gracious aid to rescue us from ignorance, sin, and misery, and by a mysterious process to bring us back to the knowledge, love, service, and enjoyment, of God. He illuminates the mind: He does more; He restores the other faculties, particularly the will, and the affections, as well as the understanding. This divine agency we are attempting to investigate: but it will become us to study the subject with much caution, humility, prayer, and self-examination. Let us

be afraid of indulging a curious or proud disposition in speculating on matters; “ which are too wonderful for us.” Let us pray, that we may not only be convinced by argument, that the grace of the Holy Ghost is absolutely needful for us, but that we may ourselves experience its mighty energy. May He, the great Teacher of his Church, instruct us ! He, the sovereign agent, work in us effectually, “ both to will and to do !”

As we are advancing in this part of our plan, we shall see the character of real Christians exhibited : and it will form a striking contrast to the description already given of man in his state of apostasy and ruin. They are rescued, not by an act of indemnity alone, not merely through the interposition of our adorable Redeemer, but also by the operation of the divine Spirit, producing in them a total alteration of dispositions, principles, and habits. They are distinguished from others by the excellency of their conduct, being taught and enabled to live “ in all holy conversation and godliness.” But their good works are only the result of what the Spirit hath wrought and implanted in them. The foundation of all their pure and acceptable obedience is laid in his gracious influence upon their souls, whereby they become entirely different from what they once were, and are properly denominated “ new creatures.” We proceed to consider

I. The nature of this internal and moral change, our account of which must be wholly derived from the scriptures. It will not be denied, that much is said in those sacred records concerning the universal necessity of such a change, and the appropriate experience of true Christians. Various metaphors are made use of to describe it, which represent it indeed in different points of view, and yet their general interpretation is the same. This metaphorical language is not to be strained, for a very minute application would be extremely absurd : but as it was meant to convey some instruction, it ought not to be refined or subtilized into nothing ; and for the most part it is not difficult to collect what is principally intended. Let us be willing to abide by the obvious sense.

Christians are said to be “ regenerate,” “ begotten again,” and “ born of God * ;” all which and similar expressions imply, that they remain not the same as other men are, as to the state of their minds, but that through a divine influence they receive a new nature, and enter on another sort of life ; for birth is generally considered as the beginning of life. From this point, then, which forms with them a critical era, commences their religious character, their spiritual existence. By the first or natural birth they come into this

* Titus iii. 5. 1 Peter i. 3. 1 John i. 13.

world, partake of an animal life, and rank among the children of the family, from which they spring. By regeneration such a different constitution of things is produced within them, as to their perceptions, propensities, and enjoyments, that they may be said in metaphorical language to pass into a new world; then only they begin to live in a spiritual manner, and are “received into the number of the children of God and heirs of everlasting life.”

They “put off the old man,” and “put on the new man *,” because they are delivered from their former corrupt bias, and from that system of depravity, which adheres to our fallen nature; and they are brought under the influence of a nobler and more excellent principle of action, which is then implanted in them. They are “renewed in the spirit of their mind;” for all the faculties of their mind then receive a new direction, and begin to answer a far higher purpose than they had done before. Such is the case with their understanding, imagination, memory, conscience, will, and affections. “Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new †:” inasmuch as their desires and inclinations, their hopes, fears, and joys, their conversation, pursuits, and practices, which were once totally carnal, now give place and are exchanged for those which are pure and spiritual.

* Eph. iv. 22—24.

† 2 Cor. v. 17.

This is an alteration so entire and glorious, that it is termed “a new creation*,” not as if different powers and faculties were bestowed, but because those, which are by our natural corruption perverted, are new modelled and as it were made over again. Those therefore, who can contemplate such a renovation within themselves, may exclaim with grateful adoration of the grace of the Spirit, “We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works †.”

It is a spiritual resurrection; which implies, that the soul is previously devoid of all holy principles and efforts, without any the least tendency to goodness, and that it then receives an energy, which produces the most vigorous activity and delight in the service of God. “You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.”—“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above ‡.”

This renovation is true repentance, the scriptural name for which (*μετάνοια*) is no other than a change of mind; a total alteration of a man's habits, plans, and motives. For no one is to be accounted a true penitent, whose inward dispositions remain the same, whatever external practices he may have relinquished.—This also is conversion; for it is the turning of the soul to

* Gal. vi. 15.

† Eph. ii. 10.

‡ Eph. ii. 1. Col. iii. 1.

God, which had been previously alienated from him.—It is likewise, what some divines have termed, effectual calling. At least, it is in consequence of such a renewal of the mind, that the sinner attends to and obeys the call of God, so as to yield an unfeigned, cordial, and uniform submission.

According to the interpretation here given, there is nothing forced or unnatural in the metaphors made use of; all is plain and consistent. But if no such spiritual change be admitted, we can perceive no propriety or meaning whatever in these descriptions. The nature and process of the operation alluded to will more fully appear, when we consider its effects. What has been suggested may lead us to enquire, whether we have formed right conceptions of it, or understand it by our own personal experience. But, though in this respect we cannot pronounce positively, we may be furnished with instruction and encouragement, if indeed we desire to know it for ourselves, while we remark

II. The author of it. In order to correct dangerous mistakes, arising from that conceit which men generally entertain of their own ability to do good, it is necessary to shew that this spiritual renovation is not to be produced by any human efforts, and that we are, as to this point, “without strength.” When Christians are described as being regenerate, it is expressly declared,

without excepting any who might be thought to possess in themselves greater power or virtue than others, "They were born, not of blood, nor of the will of flesh, nor of the will of man*." Their excellence of character and disposition is not what they brought into the world with them, or derived from their ancestry however eminent in goodness; but it results entirely from that change, which has been wrought in them, not by any virtuous inclinations, resolutions, or efforts, within the compass of their corrupt nature, nor by the persuasions of friends or teachers, but by a superior and more powerful influence.

This conclusion indeed might be drawn from the figurative descriptions given of it: for they lead us to infer, that the interposition of an almighty agent is absolutely requisite. It would be an extreme absurdity to talk of any creature being the cause of its own birth, or the author of its own existence: it would be a folly too gross to be tolerated, to represent a lifeless corpse as having within itself a power of recovering its former animation and vigour. In these metaphors, then, of Regeneration, new Creation, and spiritual Resurrection, man's total inability to restore himself to his original righteousness is necessarily implied.

But the same thing is also manifest, without a

*. John i. 13.

figure, from the state of our hearts. There is in our very nature a strong and continual propensity to evil, a fixed and rooted love of sin and hatred of all holiness. How is this to be removed? That we should give ourselves different principles, or cordially desire a real and entire purity of mind, is contrary to the supposition of our depravity. “The carnal mind is enmity against God:” of itself therefore it will never submit, but obstinately persist in its rebellion. “It is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be*.” This impossibility of producing such a subjection of the soul to God, as is included in regeneration, must remain, till some foreign influence be exerted. This impossibility, however, is no other than man’s determined adherence to sin and opposition to God, which constitute not his excuse but his guilt, and will be the ground of his condemnation. It is not to be inferred, that he vehemently desires to be good, and is restrained from executing his pious purposes by some extrinsic force; but the true state of the case is, “He HATETH to be reformed,”—“He WILL NOT turn, nor fear God.”

But here we behold the display of sovereign mercy. The Lord himself interposes, and by his new-creating power restores his image in the soul. For the sake of his beloved Son, who

* Rom. viii. 7.

mediates on our behalf, he is ready to bestow his efficacious grace, and does actually confer the blessing upon all his redeemed people. Such is his own promise, “A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you*.” This subject, we doubt not, was understood, both as a doctrine and as a matter of experience, under the ancient dispensations of the old testament; but, as a larger effusion of the Spirit was reserved for the times of the gospel, we might expect that in the new testament it would be treated in a more clear and explicit manner. Accordingly, in almost every page our attention is directed to the necessity of a divine influence for the renovation of the soul. To be “born again,” and to be “born of God,” and “of the Spirit,” are in these scriptures continually used as synonymous terms: from which the inference is undeniable, that God the Spirit is the author of the change†. Such is the confession of faith delivered by primitive Christians, “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour‡.” Here, as in many other passages, the

* Ezek. xxxvi. 26.

† John i. 13. iii. 3, 5. 1 John iii. 9. v. 1, 4.

‡ Titus iii. 5, 6.

three persons of the Godhead are introduced as uniting in the same gracious plan, and our salvation is said to result from their joint interposition: but the alteration produced in the state of our minds is ascribed solely to the agency of the Spirit; it is “the renewing of the Holy Ghost;” who, as our church expresses it, is “the Lord and giver of life*.”

This is an exertion of power, as well as a manifestation of mercy, which calls for our devout admiration. “Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty†!”—“All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself,”—and reconciled us, “when we were enemies‡.” Among Christians so renewed, a variety of cases may be seen; some being turned to God in early life, others when far advanced in age; some, who had been presumptuous Pharisees, others abandoned profligates; some being wrought upon chiefly by terror, others conciliated and won by love. But, however they may differ, as to these and such like adventitious circumstances, the change produced is the same in substance, and the author is the same. For in this sense also, “there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God, which worketh all in all§.”

Let the glory be given to Him, as it is due, for every instance of his grace which we perceive

* Nicene Creed.

† Rev. xv. 3.

‡ 2 Cor. v. 18. Rom. v. 10.

§ 1 Cor. xii. 6.

in others, and especially for every degree of it we discover in ourselves. Such is the grateful acknowledgment we are taught to make, “Thou, Lord, hast wrought all our works in us*.” Let those also, who lament their inability, confess it with sincere contrition, and lift up to him their importunate cries for help. Most assuredly he will not disdain their request. It may be proper therefore to point out

III. The means, which the Holy Spirit is generally pleased to make use of. He is not bound by any specific rules or mode of conduct in his procedure: for he performs his operations in a sovereign manner, and sometimes without the intervention of any visible means whatever. But there are certain ordinances of his own appointment, to which we ought to pay the most serious regard, and in them we may expect the communications of his grace.

1. He has given us his written word, which we should read and study with humility and diligence. Parents and teachers should endeavour to impress upon the minds of young people the doctrines and precepts of this inspired book, and encourage their frequent perusal of it. The sacred declarations contained therein, the Lord has been pleased to honour in numberless instances, as the means of “turning the hearts of the disobedient

* Isaiah xxi. 12.

to the wisdom of the just." In the hands of the Spirit, by whom they were indited, they "are able to make us wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus*." Many can testify, that such has been the blessed effect of reading them in the family or in the closet, and say with David, in respect both to the beginning and the progress of divine grace in their souls, "I will never forget thy precepts; for with them Thou hast quickened me†:" or with St. James, adoring the sovereignty of God in the work, and being thankful for the instrument, "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth‡."

2. He has appointed the ministry of the gospel, for the special purpose of reconciling sinners to himself§. This method he has honoured more than any other, in the enlargement of his church. His ministers cry aloud in his name to a careless world, "Be ye reconciled to God:" but the efficacy of all their arguments and expostulations depends upon the Spirit's influence||. They have encouragement to expect that he will prosper their exertions, and that, though they are weak and worthless in themselves, yet being assiduous and faithful in their holy function, "they shall turn many to righteousness." The numerous conversions, recorded in the new testament, were chiefly effected in this way. The gospel came

* 2 Tim. iii. 15.

† Psalm cxix. 93.

‡ James i. 18.

§ 2 Cor. v. 18—20.

|| 1 Cor. iii. 7.

unto them that heard it, “not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost*.” Thus Lydia was joined to the church, “the Lord having opened her heart, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul†.” Thus also the apostle described his success among the Corinthians, “In Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel‡:” and on the same ground he calls Onesimus “his son, whom he had begotten in his bonds§.” O for the energy of the Spirit to accompany the public ministration of the word among ourselves; and it will still be “mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds||!” Let those, who are intrusted with such an embassy, “faint not,” nor be “ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth**.”

3. He invites sinners to come to the throne of grace, where the Lord waits to hear and answer their petitions. The promise of the Spirit is given “to them that ask him††.” Other means may be employed, but none can supersede the use of prayer. It is indispensably requisite in all cases, and, if persisted in with importunity and with humble dependence upon God, it will infallibly prevail. After the most explicit declarations of

* 1 Thess. i. 5.

† Acts xvi. 14.

‡ 1 Cor. iv. 15.

§ Philem. 10.

|| 2 Cor. x. 3.

** 2 Cor. iv. 1. Rom. i. 16.

†† Luke xi. 13.

sovereign mercy to Israel, the Lord added, “ I will yet for this be enquired of* :” and he never said to any, “ Seek ye me in vain † .” It is not possible, that he can insult or mock us, by exciting our desires and encouraging our supplications, and then finally disappointing and rejecting us. It was well argued by Manoah’s wife, “ If the Lord were pleased to kill us, He would not have shewed us all these things ‡ ;” and with equal propriety the awakened penitent, whose heart is drawn forth in fervent prayer, may conclude, “ He will grant me the thing, which I long for, and not frustrate the hopes and expectations, which are grounded on his own word.” Go on, then, with increasing ardour to besiege the throne of grace, you who feel your need of his regenerating influences, and cry with David, “ Create in me a clean heart, O God ; and renew a right spirit within me § .”

In whatever way the work is effected, and though it may not be for some time the object of notice, Regeneration is at once complete ; for it is only the beginning of a new and spiritual life. But a continual advancement is to be made in holiness, and Christians should be urged to seek after it. The very same means also, which may be employed for the first planting, are requisite for the cherishing and strengthening, of this divine

* Ezek. xxxvi. 37.

† Judges xiii. 23.

‡ Isaiah xlv. 19.

§ Psalm li. 10.

principle in the soul. “Wherefore—as new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby*.”

But if, as we fear, the whole of this subject should be treated with derision, it is necessary to warn profane scoffers of their danger; and we would do it with all solemnity in the words of an apostle, “Beware, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets, Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which you shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you†.” Do any plead in their own excuse, that they have no strength, and therefore will not bestir themselves to use the means appointed? The weakness and absurdity of their argument would be seen and confessed by all, if applied to common concerns. It is also as wicked as it is foolish; for you shew a contempt of God in neglecting the means, and the true reason, why you will not seek for the Spirit, is, that you are too proud to solicit his assistance, and hate the service, to which he would lead you. Your danger therefore is extreme; for whatever you may urge in your defence, the God of heaven will not reverse his decree, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God‡.”

* 1 Peter ii. 1, 2.

† Acts xiii. 40, 41.

‡ John iii. 3.

ESSAY XXXVIII.

ON THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT IN REGENERATION.

PART II.

In regeneration we may further consider—Its effects and evidences; such are—penitential sorrow,—importunate prayer,—deliverance from sin,—submission and conformity to Christ,—spirituality of mind,—and victory over the world.—Its necessity,—for good works,—for communion with God,—and for the fruition of heaven.

THE subject before us is not to be treated with trifling indifference, much less with that scurrilous contempt, which it has too often met with. “It is not a vain thing for us; because it is our life.” The testimonies of scripture, already produced, are sufficient to establish the doctrine we have laid down: they will not admit of a fair or consistent interpretation on any other supposition. But they do more than confirm its truth; they prove its importance: and it will now appear, from some additional considerations, that it

is not a point of empty speculation, but one of such awful magnitude, that our final felicity depends upon it. Let us proceed, then, in our disquisition with all possible seriousness of mind, and with fervent prayer for the guidance of the divine Spirit. Having shewn the nature, the author, and the means, of regeneration, we now propose to investigate

I. Its effects and evidences. It is, as we have seen, a new creation of the soul, or a renovation of its faculties, by which they are directed to their proper end, and restored to their original use and excellence. Such is the apostolical description, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new*." The perceptions of the mind are very different from those which it once entertained: the films of ignorance, prejudice, and sin, being removed from the intellectual eye, spiritual things are seen as transcendently glorious: they are not only admitted as true, but viewed with delight and admiration. The will receives a different bias, being now inclined by a powerful influence to chuse the paths of holiness, from which it was accustomed to turn away with disgust. The affections, which were wont to push forward the soul in the pursuit of every thing vain, foolish, and wicked, now become pure,

* 2 Cor. v. 17.

spiritual, and heavenly, give animation and vigour to all its efforts in the service of God, and in its progress towards a better world. Of consequence, the habits and practices of the regenerate man are very opposite to those of the carnal. He is introduced into enjoyments of a nobler kind, than any which he had formerly known, or which others are acquainted with: and his very fears and distresses, which are appropriate to himself, clearly discriminate his state and character. Thus, his heart being changed, he is throughout “a new creature:” it were absurd to suppose, that his conversation and his life can continue the same; he is “created in righteousness and true holiness*.”

On account of the effect produced, this is called “the washing of regeneration†:” for by it that power of innate depravity, which defiles the soul, and renders us offensive and abominable in the sight of the holy Lord God, is subdued, and a principle of purity, highly pleasing to Him, is implanted. The grace therefore, by which this internal ablution is performed, is compared to “water,” for its cleansing efficacy. Under this symbol it is promised, “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you‡:” and we are thus taught to

* Eph. iv. 24.

† Titus iii. 5.

‡ Ezek. xxxvi. 25.

pray for the purification of the heart, as well as for pardon, "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin *." The Saviour himself adopted this similitude, when he declared the necessity of regeneration to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God †." For this reason, we presume, in the ordinance of baptism, water is appointed to be administered as "the outward and visible sign of the inward and spiritual grace," of which it is so significant an emblem.

The descriptions given should induce us to institute a most strict and solemn enquiry into our own state and character. Let each one ask, What have I known of this spiritual renovation? Is the pollution of my nature removed? And am I brought under the influence of a fixed and holy principle, regulating and controlling the secret motions of my heart? How important are such interrogatories! yet, alas! how little attended to! Impressed with a fear of delusion, or of resting in a superficial religion, let us prosecute this interesting examination, till we can arrive at some satisfactory conclusion. In order to this, it will be expedient to point out the proper marks and evidences of regeneration, that we may discriminate the genuine work of the Spirit

* Psalm li. 2.

† John iii. 5.

from false appearances and counterfeit pretensions. The only infallible rule for the direction of our judgment is the word of God; and it hath laid down the following signs as the inseparable concomitants or necessary effects of the new birth.

1. Penitential sorrow for sin. This is described as being invariably produced by that effusion of the Spirit, which renovates the soul. It is this grace, which brings to remembrance former iniquities, which detects the secret impurities of the heart, which excites an abhorrence of evil, which alarms the conscience, which gives very sharp compunctions, and never fails to ashame and humble the person, who comes under its influence. Thus, after Ezekiel's remarkable account of the conversion of Israel, it is added, "Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight, for your iniquities and for your abominations*." On the day of Pentecost also, the Spirit being poured out, not upon the apostles only, but upon the surrounding multitudes, the numerous auditors, who had just before been careless, presumptuous, and obdurate, were suddenly arrested, covered with confusion, and constrained to cry for mercy. "They were pricked in their heart, and said,—Men, and brethren, what shall we do†?"

* Ezek. xxxvi. 31.

† Acts ii. 37.

2. Importunate prayer to God. Many may be terrified, even so as to be driven to despondency, who remain inflexibly proud and hardened, unwilling to supplicate or accept salvation. Such were Cain, Pharaoh, Saul, and Judas. But that sincere and genuine contrition, which the divine Spirit produces, always conducts the penitent to the throne of grace, and draws forth from his mouth the most earnest petitions for pardon, though it be only upon the mere "peradventure He will accept of me:" or, if the desires of the mind be too big for expression, this contrition will be evidenced at least by "groanings which cannot be uttered*." "The Spirit of grace," which God has promised to pour upon his church, is also termed "the Spirit of supplications," because the never-failing effect of it is to incline the heart to prayer, and enlarge the affections in the performance of the duty; for therein especially "He helpeth our infirmities, and maketh intercession for us." It was therefore given as a testimony of St. Paul's conversion, "Behold, he prayeth." He had been previously living in habits of strict compliance with all the religious ceremonies of the Jews; but such formality was unavailing, it was not accounted as any service rendered to God: then only for the first time it is allowed that he offered up any real and

* Rom. viii. 26.

acceptable petition to heaven, when under the influence of the Spirit, alarmed with the view of his guilt and danger, he cried out, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do *?"

3. Deliverance from the prevailing power of sin. The change we contend for will be known by its excellent fruits; and in stating these we shall have occasion to reprove the ignorance and detect the hypocrisy of many, who pretend to it. We must therefore declare, that the principle of divine grace invariably produces an abhorrence of whatever is known to be wrong, and gives efficacy to the resolutions and efforts of true penitents, so that they acquire and maintain the ascendancy over all their corrupt affections. For such is the position of an infallible witness, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for His seed remaineth in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God †." We are not pleading for absolute perfection, as attainable in this life; but so much at least must be inferred from this strong assertion, that no regenerate person can take pleasure in iniquity, be subject to its dominion in any respect, or wilfully persist in the habitual practice of it; and that the infusion of this spiritual principle, called "the seed of God," which abideth in the Christian, is his only preservative from the snares and temptations,

* Acts ix. 6, 11.

† 1 John iii. 9. v. 18.

to which he is exposed. Thus the interests of holiness are secured.

4. An unreserved submission to Christ, and a conformity to his mind. True penitents, under the influence of the Spirit, will not rest in formality, or be satisfied with their own obedience. The same grace, which rouses their fears and produces in them an abhorrence of evil, will conduct them to the cross, and dispose them to bow down at the feet of the Saviour. Thus He himself has described the case, "Every man that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me*." To real converts, therefore, Christ will be "precious," and by them he will be embraced and submitted to in all his offices: and while they are looking unto Him, they "are changed into the same image†," and receive a similarity of character. It was the purpose of God, that his children should "be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren‡." Accordingly they "put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge, after the image of Him that created him§." Not only "shall they be like him" hereafter, but even now "as He is, so are they in this world||." What an extensive field for enquiry does this consideration open! In what respects, or to

* John vi. 45.

† 2 Cor. iii. 18.

‡ Rom. viii. 29.

§ Col. iii. 10.

|| 1 John iii. 2. iv. 17.

what degree, do we possess the similitude of Jesus Christ? It is not difficult to ascertain from this description, "what manner of persons we ought to be, in all holy conversation and godliness*." But upon a comparison of ourselves with our great Exemplar, are we not ashamed and confounded? Those evidently lie under a fatal delusion, who suppose that they belong to "the household of faith," and yet bear no marks of resemblance to Christ, but in disposition and conduct are totally opposite.

5. Spirituality of mind. Man, as a fallen creature, and while he lives in an unregenerate state, is "earthly and sensual:" he "minds the things of the flesh:" in one way or another, they are the grand object of all his purposes and pursuits, and they constitute his best enjoyments. But, by the influence of the Holy Ghost, his thoughts and affections are fixed on high and heavenly things, and his whole soul is drawn upwards by a sweet and powerful attractive. He then feels, that he belongs to a better country, on which he meditates with delight, for the fruition of which he pants with eager desire, and towards which he presses with most vigorous exertions. Thus we are assured, "They that are after the Spirit, do mind the things of the Spirit:" and it is urged as a decisive evidence of

* 2 Peter iii. 11.

their character, "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the Sons of God *." Accordingly, if interrogated as to their plans and expectations, they should be able to reply, "Our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ †." How forcible then is the exhortation, and what "searchings of heart" should it excite, "If ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God: set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth: for ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God ‡!" Hence also we mention, as a part of the Christian's evidence,

6. Victory over the world. We are all disposed to submit to the dominion of this spiritual enemy; and it is impossible to enumerate the various ways, in which we are enslaved and led captive by it. No principles of reason, no efforts of nature, will enable any one to refuse even an abject compliance with its maxims and customs, to resist its solicitations, and disregard its menaces. The regenerate person alone asserts his liberty; and he does it only by virtue of the renovating influence of the Holy Spirit. "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world,

* Rom viii. 5, 14.

† Phil. iii. 20.

‡ Col. iii. 1—3.

even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God *?" But have we, according to our baptismal engagements, "renounced the pomps and vanities of this wicked world?" Or where is the peculiar badge of our christian profession, if we have no strength or courage to stand against either its frowns or its smiles? Have we yet to learn, that we must not be "conformed to this world," if indeed we be "transformed by the renewing of our mind †?" Let us fear for ourselves, lest we come short of true, vital Christianity, or deceive ourselves by any false evidences or notions of religion. We proceed to shew

II. The necessity of regeneration. It is a change, which when seen in others may well excite our admiration, as being the work of God, and productive of excellent effects: but we must experience it in ourselves. It is not only of great use; it is absolutely and indispensably requisite: it is so, not merely for men remarkably vicious and abandoned, but for ALL without exception. This necessity arises, not from any defect of education, or from inveterate habits of evil, which may have induced in some persons a peculiar degree of boldness and obduracy in sin; but from that depravity which is inherent in our nature, and which has spread through the whole human

* 1 John v. 4, 5.

† Rom. xii. 2.

race. If, as we represent, we are from our very birth so totally corrupt, that “in us, that is in our flesh, dwelleth no good thing *,” and if, in consequence of this, we lie under a moral inability to effect our own recovery, then it follows, that our souls must be renewed in holiness, and that a divine influence must be exerted for that purpose.

We wonder not, that those who strenuously maintain man’s native innocence, and his entire competence “to fulfil all righteousness,” deny the doctrine of regeneration, as it is here stated. They must do it, to be consistent with themselves: and indeed an ignorance of our degeneracy, and of the fatal effects of the fall, will account for most of those erroneous systems, so flattering to our pride, which have been raised in opposition to evangelical truth. Such systems, being built upon hypotheses, which contradict positive facts and universal experience, cannot stand. But it will remain an incontrovertible position, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh:” every thing in creation produces its like; and from unholy parents a pure offspring cannot be derived. There must therefore be a renovation of our nature, which can be produced only by the author of all goodness. “And that which is born of the Spirit is spirit †:” the new

* Rom. vii. 18.

† John iii. 6.

principle resembles the gracious agent, by whom it is implanted in the soul. On these grounds we maintain the necessity of "the renewing of the Holy Ghost" for the following purposes:

1. For the performance of any service, really excellent in itself or acceptable to God. Let it be universally acknowledged, that we are under indispensable obligations to love, worship, obey, and glorify, the God who made us. But, remaining in an unconverted state, we shall always resist his claims, and refuse to be subject to his law, though most reasonable: we shall do nothing from a pure regard to him, or from right motives. "We must be born again;" or else both religion and morality will be neglected, or the duties of them practised with dispositions, which will vitiate the whole. It were absurd, then, to preach up holiness, and yet not insist on regeneration; unless we could disprove our Lord's solemn declaration, that "without Him we can do nothing*." But let this point be properly understood, in experience as well as in speculation, and the consistency and excellence of our theological system will be manifest. For it will appear, that "we are the workmanship of God, created in Christ Jesus unto good works†."

2. For maintaining communion with God. It is described as the highest privilege of Christians,

* John xv. 5.

† Eph. ii. 10.

and the source of their noblest pleasures, that they are admitted to a state of holy fellowship with Jehovah himself, that He walks with them, and they with Him *. But this is an eminence and a felicity not to be attained, without the participation of a new and divine nature. "Can two walk together, except they be agreed †?" Conceiving, as we do, of God's purity, and of our perverseness, we believe it to be unsuitable to his character to draw nigh unto us, and impossible in the nature of things, that He should receive us to his friendship, till a reconciliation has been effected: and that reconciliation must be effected by a change of disposition on our part; for "with Him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning ‡." Is man, we ask, corrupted as he now is, a fit associate for Him, "whose name is holy?" Those, who presume upon being admitted to an intercourse with him, without a renovation of mind, must either think too highly of themselves, or derogate from his dignity and excellence.

3. For the fruition of heaven, into which no unclean thing shall ever enter. The unregenerate are excluded by the righteous sentence of God, from which he will not recede; for they are, and in that state they must remain, "children of wrath §." But, what is not sufficiently considered, they are utterly disqualified for that happiness,

* 2 Cor. vi. 16. 1 John i. 7.

† James i. 17.

‡ Amos iii. 3.

§ Eph. ii. 3.

which is prepared for the saints, because it is inseparably connected with holiness. There can be no enjoyment there for one, who does not love God supremely, or account his service the highest delight. It follows therefore, as a necessary consequence, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*." If it were possible for him to be admitted there, he would find nothing suited to his taste. Both the company and the employment would be such as he would loathè; and especially the near view and the immediate presence of the "Holy Lord God Almighty," would overwhelm him with horror and anguish. For dying as he is, he must even there feel the same disposition, which he now does, and that is "enmity against God†." With such an irreconcilable hatred to Jehovah, he could experience no happiness in heaven, but would wish to be driven out from it, as from a place of consummate misery. The conclusion, then, forces itself upon us, from the unalterable constitution of things, as well as from the irreversible decree of the universal Judge, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord‡."

* John iii. 3.

† Rom. viii. 7.

‡ Heb. xii. 14.

ESSAY XXXIX.

ON THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT IN REGENERATION.

PART III.

Regeneration is more than an external ablution by baptism,—or reformation,—or a change of religious parties or opinions.—The doctrine is exposed to reproach by those,—who depend upon visions or impressions,—who neglect the means of grace,—or who attend not to its practical effects and evidences.—It is congruous to reason,—and favourable to real holiness.

No one article of the christian faith has excited more contemptuous reproach, or has been more shamefully misrepresented, abused, and perverted, than that which is now before us. The ignorance, folly, and perverseness of men, and their endless diversities of sentiment, have rendered it more difficult than it would otherwise have been, to arrive at any satisfactory conclusions in religious enquiries, or to form a solid, harmonious, and connected system. Though we be convinced by

positive proofs of the truth of the doctrine we are examining, it may be expedient to obviate mistakes, to suggest cautions, and to stop the mouths of scornful opponents. This at least we shall attempt, in a brief manner.

I. Let us guard against certain prevailing errors upon the subject. Various opinions concerning regeneration have been maintained, which seem to contradict, or to come far short of, the scripture account. It may be necessary therefore to shew that these representations are false or defective.

1. It is not a mere external ablution by Baptism. We mean not to derogate from the honour of that divine ordinance, when we assert, that too much dependence has been placed upon it. Being an institution of Christ, it ought to be religiously observed and revered, not only as the appointed mode of admission into his church, but as the means in which we may ask and expect the communication of that grace, of which it is so significant an emblem. It may therefore not improperly be called "the laver of regeneration." This sacrament consists of two parts, neither of which should be considered as superseded by the other. We should especially be careful, not to neglect or to rest satisfied without "the inward and spiritual grace," merely because we have been partakers of "the outward and visible sign." Though we allow the latter to be

“generally necessary,” yet we maintain the former to be indispensably and universally requisite, for it is that “death unto sin and new birth unto righteousness,” by which, as our Catechism has well expressed it, “we are made the children of grace.” This account ought to be admitted as a proper explanation of the strong language, which our church has used in some other passages respecting the high privileges of Baptism.

It is indeed a gross and dangerous delusion to imagine, that because our bodies are washed or sprinkled with water, we are necessarily regenerate, whatever be the inward state and disposition of our souls. It is “not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, which saves us, but the answer of a good conscience toward God *:” and this is not to be attained without a spiritual renovation. If all, who have submitted to the outward rite, are also partakers of the thing signified, whatever is asserted concerning the character of the regenerate, may be applied equally to Them. But such an application would immediately discover the absurdity of the sentiment. “As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God †;” and none others are admitted into his family. But do all baptized persons answer to this description, or appear to walk under the sacred guidance and direction of the Holy Ghost?

* 1 Peter iii. 21.

† Rom. viii. 14.

“Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin*,” but is it true of all, who are received into the visible church, that they are not chargeable with any allowed habits of iniquity? “Whatsoever is born of God, overcometh the world†;” but without a violation of that charity, which “hopeth all things,” we may confess, and we should lament, that many, who have been externally devoted to God by the sacramental ablution of water, are pursuing with great avidity the things of earth, and are miserably enslaved to the vain and corrupt maxims and customs of ungodly men.

2. The change we contend for is more than mere reformation or decency of manners: for these, however necessary, fall far short of the descriptions given of “the renewing of the Holy Ghost.” They do not imply any pure and holy principles, but they may consist with a total absence of all internal and vital religion. We read of those, who “make clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but their inward part is full of ravening and wickedness‡.” Notwithstanding all their fair appearances, and their endeavours to establish a reputation, their hearts are in a state of enmity against God. Shall we presume, that persons of such a character can be acceptable to the righteous Lord God, who “desireth truth in

* 1 John iii. 9.

† 1 John v. 4.

‡ Luke xi. 39.

the inward parts *?" The most corrupt motives may induce men to preserve, or to return to, a regularity of conduct; which therefore cannot require the aid of the everblessed Spirit. Reason itself may shew them the folly and the danger of gross vices, which consequently they may relinquish, and become honest, chaste, and temperate, from the mere consideration of their temporal interest, without any regard to God, and without the assistance of his grace. From such an external decency, or amendment, for which even our depraved nature is competent, we have no right to infer, that they are "born of God:" and it would be absurd to imagine, that our Lord would have spoken, as he did to Nicodemus, concerning regeneration, if he had meant only that we must be regular, or reform our conduct when it has been otherwise. We cannot suppose, that he would have used so much solemnity or obscurity of language, to convey an obvious truth, of which no one ever doubted, and which could not so surprise or puzzle Nicodemus, as did the doctrine advanced by our Lord. These are considerations, which should arrest the attention and awaken the fears of those, who have maintained or recovered a reputation for their morality. They lie under the peculiar danger of concluding, that nothing more can be required

* Psalm li. 6.

of them : and yet we see, that possibly they may be destitute of the Spirit ; and in that case they cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

3. Regeneration is not merely an exchanging of one religious party or opinion for another. In order to evade its spiritual import, various and absurd interpretations have been invented and admitted. It has been said to be nothing more than a renunciation of Judaism or of Paganism, upon a reception of the gospel. Possibly, those, who professed to embrace the christian system and abandon their previous errors, were sometimes described by early writers as “ the regenerate ;” but this seems to have been done in the stretch of charity, upon a supposition of their sincerity and entire conversion. Then the meaning is no other than what we contend for : since every one, who really believes the gospel, is indeed a renewed person. “ No man can say, that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost*.” But we must not therefore infer, that our religion is only an external profession of truth, or that men cannot make such a profession, without feeling its influence, or partaking of its benefits. Even the Jews themselves were reminded, that their various ceremonies, and especially the rite of initiation into their church, represented an internal and spiritual purification, without which

* 1 Cor. xii. 3.

they were not allowed to belong to “the Israel of God.” “He is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God*.” The description is exactly applicable, and furnishes a striking admonition to all who are admitted by baptism into the christian church. And thus our Lord speaks, concerning the hypocritical professors of his gospel, “I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan †.” No declaration of regard to Him or to his truth, without a renovation of the soul, will satisfy him, or prove us to be his disciples, however we may change our religious parties or opinions. We may renounce a corrupt church, and yet ourselves remain corrupt; or we may become members of a pure one, and yet not be pure. Such converts will receive no advantage for themselves, nor will they bring any credit to the cause which they espouse.

II. Let us defend the doctrine from abuse. We lament, that some fanatical representations and unholy perversions have exposed it to much reproach, from which we are solicitous that it may be rescued.

* Rom. ii. 28, 29.

† Rev. ii. 9.

1. There are those, who may be thought from their injudicious accounts to place their religion in wild reveries, violent impressions, or rapturous sensations. If examined as to their experience of "the renewing of the Holy Ghost," they have some dream or vision to relate, or they can refer us to some texts of scripture, which with great force have been injected into their minds, or to remarkable extasies they have felt in their devotions. Now, without enquiring whether they are not carried away by a deluded imagination, it must be granted that many pious persons possess no solidity of judgment, and may grossly mistake the nature and evidences of regeneration, of which therefore their descriptions may be confused and irrational. They may possibly fall into many enthusiastic notions of the work of the Spirit, or comprise in it many circumstances, with which it has no connection. We need not determine concerning the kind or the reality of their extraordinary impressions or emotions: suffice it to observe, that these do not constitute or prove the change, of which we speak. They may sometimes be its appendages; but they are fallacious marks, for they may consist with unholy dispositions, and are often boasted of by men, who are yet in their sins. It is desirable, that persons professing godliness should carefully discriminate what is essential in the renovation of the soul from all adventitious

circumstances; and that they should be aware of the mischiefs, which may result from enthusiasm. For we fear, that infidels triumph in the absurdities, which are to be found amongst them, and on this ground deride the work of the Spirit, which we contend for, as no other than the fiction of knaves, or as the extravagant conceit of visionaries and fools.

2. Some also, under a pretended conviction that a change of heart can be effected only by the mighty power of God, are willing so entirely to leave the matter with Him, that they persist in neglecting the means, which he has appointed. As it depends not, say they, on our own exertions, it would be presumptuous in us to attempt it, or to take any step towards it. A deplorable abuse indeed of a right principle! Is it so, that God alone can accomplish it? Then surely the most earnest application should be made to Him for his gracious interposition: and especially, if he has prescribed any method, in which he has told you that you may expect his blessing, your immediate and implicit compliance should be yielded. Devout meditation and fervent prayer, the reading and hearing of his word with serious attention,—these are his own ordinances, in which you should wait upon him without ceasing: they have been made effectual to the conversion of thousands; and, if there were only a bare peradventure they might be so to your's, it should

encourage you to a diligent use of them. "All things are of God," in providence as well as in grace; but this obvious and acknowledged truth you do not so pervert in the common concerns of life. He alone can render your fields fruitful, and give increase to your seed sown; but you do not therefore neglect the means of cultivation. You expect that he will prosper your labours; and you admit that the slothful man is justly punished with poverty and disgrace. You also will be inexcusable, while you refuse to comply with his institutions: for your refusal evinces a contempt of his mercy as well as of his power, and a determination to continue in your sins, whatever may be the consequence.

3. Many others, we fear, give occasion to the adversaries of this doctrine to speak reproachfully, because they pay little or no attention to the practical part of religion. Regeneration, with them, seems to consist entirely in a speculative assent to evangelical truth; and accordingly, whatever be their temper or conduct, they consider themselves as born of God, if they can speak in high-sounding titles of the Saviour, and maintain a strong confidence in his merits. A notion this, which is totally unscriptural, and must lead to deplorable consequences. Let us revert to the descriptions, which we have already produced from the word of God; nor let us ever forget that this spiritual change is an assimilation

of the human mind in its prevailing dispositions to the mind of Christ, and that its effects and evidences are holy principles and holy practices. "We are the workmanship of God, created in Christ Jesus," not merely to be established in the assurance of faith, but "that we should walk in good works *." This, which is the great end of religion, has not been sufficiently kept in view; and, to the disgrace of the gospel, exhortations to holiness have been scouted as legal, and unsuitable to christian liberty. Duties have been neglected, as beneath the attention of believers, and unhallowed tempers have been indulged by those, who have boasted of being the children of God. Against such a scandalous abuse we would loudly protest; and it ought not to be urged as an objection to the doctrine we maintain, which, if properly understood, must be the most effectual preservative from it. Let the solemn caution be regarded, as it ought to be; and let none presume that they have received "the washing of regeneration," except they are conformed to the image of Christ, and in their measure "walk as He also walked."

III. Let us vindicate this article of our creed from profane ridicule. The very mention of it is almost sure to excite a sneer; and those, who profess it, are derided or pitied for their absurdity

* Eph. ii. 10.

or weakness. Now, though we should endeavour to be guarded, we need not wonder if even the most solid representation of the truth be treated with contempt; and we must not give up our faith in compliment to our opposers, or through the fear of reproach. We ask, what is there in the doctrine we are defending so extremely foolish, as to merit such ignominious censures? Or where is the danger? Reason, for the honour of which many are very jealous, is not abandoned. It is, in its present state, insufficient to regulate our tempers and affections: yet, in the great business of religion it is of admirable use, and even indispensably necessary; and, in the whole process of divine operations upon our minds, it pleases God to influence us in a way agreeable to the constitution of our nature, as we are free, intelligent, and rational creatures. The will suffers no violence; but it receives a proper bias and direction from the Holy Spirit. We must be active, and at the same time dependent. The grace of God does not supersede our own endeavours, but rather employs them: it is designed not to prevent, but to call forth, the exertions of all our faculties.

Where, we ask again, is the absurdity of all this? Cannot He, who at first endued us with all our powers, assist, improve, repair, and renew them? When he gave us our being, and invested us with all our moral and intellectual capacities, he did not leave us independent of himself.

Where is the inconsistency of supposing, that he may have access to our minds, though in a way that we cannot explain? Nay, if we deny the possibility of such an intervention, we must at the same time deny the possibility of his moral government: for it is chiefly by an internal influence that he controls and rules the whole human race. And, if we do not limit the power, why should we prescribe bounds to the mercy, of Jehovah, or imagine that he will not come to our aid, in our present lapsed state, to restore us to his image and service? Will our objectors say, that his interposition may be injurious to the interests of holiness? That very interposition, as we have seen, is intended to make us holy; and without it man is destitute of all those principles, which alone can render him truly obedient to God.

This is a subject too serious and important to be laughed at: and those, who are at all solicitous about their eternal salvation, should be afraid of treating it with scorn, or even with levity and indifference. Let us not trifle, when our souls are at stake. If the word of God assures us, that “we must be born again*,” instead of cavilling or disputing about the doctrine, let us anxiously enquire, what is our state towards God, and whether we possess the necessary meetness

* John iii. 7.

for his kingdom. Let the question, "Are we born again?" recur continually, till we can come to some satisfactory conclusion.

If on just grounds and by solid evidence we are persuaded, that we are "renewed in the spirit of our minds," we may rejoice in our high privileges. How exalted is the character of the children of God! "If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ*." How glorious is our prospect! "An inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, is reserved in heaven for us†." But our obligations rise in proportion to the eminence of that honourable distinction to which we are raised. "What manner of persons ought we to be," as the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty! If indeed we be admitted into his family, how great things has he done for us! Let us study to express our gratitude to our heavenly Benefactor, and act suitably to that elevated rank, in which we are now placed.

But shall "they that are after the flesh" flatter themselves, that they shall have peace? It would be an act of benevolence to awaken their fears, by a faithful representation of their case. Let us endeavour to convince them, how degraded is their state, how extreme their wretchedness, how full of horror is their prospect in futurity. Let

* Rom. viii. 17.

† 1 Pet. i. 4.

us ask, with an importunate desire to rescue them from perdition, Are you satisfied to remain where you are? Whose resemblance do you bear? To what family do you belong? And of what sort is the eternal portion, which awaits you? Let us enquire of them, Why will ye die? Why will you persist in rejecting mercy? Why will you so obstinately rush into destruction? Arise and call upon your God; and beware that you no longer quench his Spirit, lest he swear in his wrath, "They shall not enter into my rest,"

ESSAY XL.

ON TRUE REPENTANCE.

Repentance forms a part of the christian system—has respect only to sinners—is attended with compunction, sorrow, and shame—with an entire renunciation of sin, and especially of the besetting sin—will produce a desire of repairing the mischief of past offences, both towards God and towards men—is the gift of God—indispensably necessary—will find acceptance—yet of itself insufficient—not to be delayed.

IT is evident from the preceding essays, that repentance forms an essential part of the christian system. Indeed, it may be considered as included in regeneration, or as being only another name for the same thing: at least, the regenerate man, and he alone, is a true penitent. In this view it has already received a proportional share of our attention. But on some accounts it seems to require a separate discussion, particularly for the purpose of preventing or correcting certain dangerous mistakes. The subject may be thought trite and common: but it is unspeakably important, and,

as we fear, but little understood. Let us examine, whether our notions of it have not been vague, fallacious, and unscriptural.

Repentance may frequently be applied in a lax and general way to any kind of regret or sorrow, which men may feel upon the recollection of any part of their conduct. But we must use the term in a more confined and appropriate sense, as importing that peculiar disposition, which the grace of God produces, by which a person reflects upon his state and character with such a consciousness of ill-desert, as excites compunction, shame, and self-abhorrence, and by which he is sincerely desirous to avoid in future the evil of his former conduct, and if possible to repair its mischief. This is properly, what the Greek word *μετάνοια* implies, a change of mind, an entire alteration of the judgment, inclinations, and habits. This, we shall see, is indispensably necessary for all without exception, and to this alone the promises of mercy and salvation are annexed in the holy scriptures. In pointing out its nature, origin, and effects, it shall be our endeavour to distinguish the true from the false, the genuine from all counterfeit kinds. Let every reader enquire and decide for himself, “Am I a real penitent or no?”

Repentance can have respect only to sinners. If we have not transgressed the rule of duty, the subject is perfectly uninteresting to us, and we

shall treat it with indifference, however we may speculate upon it with a reference to others. Till we are convinced that we have offended, there is nothing in our conduct we shall look back upon with regret, nothing we shall wish to alter. The very first point, then, we have to learn is, that we are guilty, that we are criminal. If we stand upon our defence and justify ourselves, we stumble at the threshold of Christianity, and can never be the disciples of Jesus. Thus he asserts, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance*." But let the precepts of God's righteous law be examined in their full extent, and all our principles, desires, and pursuits, be brought to this test. Are not his injunctions reasonable and excellent? And have we not failed in numerous instances of rendering him that obedience and service, which he demands and has a right to demand from us? What is the effect produced upon our minds from such a scrutiny? Is there not a conviction of blame, for any violation or defect of duty? This at least is indispensably requisite.

There can be no true repentance without some degree of fear, distress, and compunction of heart. It is not possible that we should perceive ourselves obnoxious to the wrath of God, as transgressors of his righteous law, without being

* Mark ii. 17.

alarmed for the consequence. The view of impending destruction must excite a dread, and this dread may be salutary, as constraining the sinner to change his line of conduct, and “to flee from the wrath to come.” And such appears to be the general impression, which at first takes place in those, who sincerely turn from their unrighteousness. But terror alone is not sufficient to denominate a man a real penitent. How often do we see a bold offender suddenly arrested in his course, agitated and affrighted at the prospect which presents itself before him; and yet his inward propensities and dispositions remain the same! He may be so intimidated, that he may not dare to hold fast his iniquities, though he wishes to do it: and should the alarm subside, and the hope of impunity revive, he will return to them with avidity. The obdurate Pharaoh relented, under the smart of God’s afflicting rod; but upon the removal of each succeeding plague he hardened his heart, and sinned yet the more. The unrighteous Felix trembled at the intimation of a judgment to come; but he was not willing to set himself in earnest to prepare for it. Such also was the compunction of Judas for his treachery to his Lord, that he could not bear to live; but though the anguish and terror of his conscience were extreme, none ever maintained, that he died a penitent. The souls that perish eternally will feel unutterable agonies of distress

and horror for their past wickedness; but those agonies will be unavailing, they will produce no favourable alteration in their state or character.

Sorrow, then, does not constitute true repentance, nay possibly may never lead to it, and yet it is its inseparable attendant. No particular degree of it can be insisted on, as essentially necessary: for it may please God in his gracious operations to deal very differently with different persons; and accordingly, the cases of real converts are in this respect extremely various. No one therefore should be set up as a model for another. But, though they may be more or less impressed with terror, it is equally characteristic of them all, that they “sorrow after a godly sort:” and this is the sorrow, which “worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of*.” They grieve, not because God is so holy as to hate all manner of iniquity, or his law so strict as to allow of no deviation, or the sentence denounced against transgressors so rigorous as to doom them to eternal punishment. To grieve on these accounts, as some who are much alarmed most evidently do, is to manifest a disposition very hostile and very offensive to God.

“The damnation of hell” may be an object of dread to sincere penitents, but they acknowledge their liableness to it, they admire the righteousness

* 2 Cor. vii. 10, 11.

of God, though it might seem to preclude their hopes of mercy, and they consent to the equity of his law in its severest decisions. Their most pungent distress arises from such considerations as these, that their conduct and tempers both towards God and man have been foolish, base, and abominable; that sin, of which they are conscious to a degree beyond what they are able to express, is in its own nature vile and detestable, as being a contempt of God, a denial of his perfections, and an opposition to his government; that He, the holy Lord God, the source of all excellence, is dishonoured; and that their souls in their noblest faculties are degraded and defiled. This is genuine contrition, it is “godly sorrow.” They are covered with shame, and feel the deepest abhorrence of themselves, upon every recollection of what they have been and what they have done: and so far from urging any shuffling excuses in their own favour, they are ever ready to pronounce their own condemnation. Such is the description given of them through all the sacred writings. “That thou mayest remember and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee, for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God *.”—“Ye shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for all your evils

* Ezek. xvi, 62.

that ye have committed *.”—“ What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed † ?”

It is essential to true repentance, and this is an obvious inference from the preceding remarks, that it produces an entire renunciation of sin, from a real hatred of it in all respects. The future conduct therefore of those, who pretend to be sorry for their offences, must prove their sincerity: and this is the only decisive evidence they can give, if their lives be spared, and opportunities be allowed. They must be addressed in the words of the Baptist, “ Bring forth fruits meet for repentance ‡ :” or in those of the Prophet, “ Wash you, make you clean: put away the evil of your doings; cease to do evil, learn to do well §.” An external amendment, we are aware, is no certain proof of an inward renovation of the mind: but the latter cannot subsist without the former, where, as we have said, there is a sufficient time for trial. Men impose upon themselves, if they imagine that they are true penitents, while they resolve or wish to hold fast any part of their iniquity, or though restrained from it for a season can allow and justify even an occasional repetition. Where, we would ask, is your conviction of the evil of sin, where your

* Ezek. xx. 43.

† Rom. vi. 21.

‡ Matth. iii. 8.

§ Isa. i. 16, 17.

abhorrence of it, if you can “ spare it, and forsake it not, but keep it still within your mouth, and hide it under your tongue;” or if you can return to it, “ as a dog to his vomit*?”

Unfeigned, genuine repentance will produce deep contrition, not only for certain gross enormities, but for every violation of the divine law, as being in its own nature heinous and detestable. Sincere converts may probably fix their attention upon some of their offences, which have been attended with peculiar aggravations, and with mischievous consequences. For these therefore, more than for any other, their tears flow, and their hearts are pained. But they will extend their views to every article of duty, and see reason to confess and lament innumerable deviations. Regarding the authority of God in one precept as well as in another, and remembering that all things are naked and open to his all-searching eye, they will mourn for their secret impurities, their foolish imaginations, their corrupt desires, their unholy propensities. This is what He requires, “ Wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved: how long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee †?” They will consider their defect in goodness, as well as their positive commission of evil, as justly meriting the displeasure of their God, and requiring their

* Job. xx. 12, 13. Prov. xxvi. 11.

† Jer. iv. 14.

continual humiliation. The weakness of their faith, the coldness of their love, their stupor and weariness in spiritual exercises, will constrain them to loathe themselves and cry earnestly for mercy.

Most persons are aware, that they are drawn to some particular sin more forcibly than to any other; that they view it with greater partiality, are less disposed to resist it, and have in fact yielded themselves as its captives and slaves. This is “the sin which doth so easily beset them* :” and this is what hypocrites and dissemblers in religion are disposed to retain. They will make large sacrifices in other respects, if an indulgence may be allowed them in this point. But true repentance is incompatible with such a reserve : nay, in order to give the most decisive proof of an entire abhorrence of evil and unfeigned regard to the will of God, it requires that this powerful adversary, more than any other, be renounced and overcome. If strong and effectual opposition be not made to it, the most ruinous consequences must follow; the victory is conceded, and the soul will be lost for ever.

Such a conviction and hatred of sin, as we have now described, will be invariably accompanied with an ardent desire to repair the mischief, which it has produced. It is not possible indeed, by

* Heb. xii. 1.

any exertions whatever, to effect this: but the true penitent will be disposed to do what he can. He perceives with keen remorse, that he has dishonoured the God of heaven; and he can make no compensation. But he will give glory to Him by a frank and unreserved confession of his guilt*; he will acknowledge the justice of the sentence by which he is condemned; he will lie down in the dust as deserving to perish, and adore the long-suffering which preserved him from merited destruction. Thus he allows and admires those perfections of Jehovah, which he before denied or malignantly opposed: and his supreme regard to him will be evinced, not in the closet only, but by his strenuous efforts in public to shew forth his praise. He will therefore walk in holy subjection to him, bear testimony to the excellency of his service, and rejoice in bringing others to the knowledge and love of his name. But whatever he does, he will own that he cannot repair the evil of his former transgressions, and that a satisfaction, far beyond his ability to make, is indispensably required. He will therefore fly for refuge to the atonement of the cross of Christ, and exult in that sacrifice, as vindicating the violated honour of his God, and displaying his various attributes in perfect harmony before the astonished universe.

* Josh. vii. 19.

The penitent will also enquire, by what means he may in any measure counteract the evil of his conduct towards his fellow-creatures. He cannot even calculate the extent and magnitude of the mischief, which he has done to others, if not by fraud and dishonesty, by seduction or slander, yet by his example and influence, and by the propagation of false and wicked principles. Can there be any adequate compensation in any of these cases? Money obtained by injustice may be restored, characters aspersed may be vindicated, but innocence cannot be retrieved, the seduced cannot always be reclaimed, the souls that are lost have perished beyond recovery. But the penitent will evince his sincerity, by confessing his guilt, and making what restitution he can, to those whom he has injured. Every particle of dishonest gain must be given back to the lawful owners, if they can be found, or if not, to their representatives, or to the poor. To retain it, knowingly and wilfully, is to repeat the wrong: and what evidence can there be of true repentance, where any iniquitous practice is persisted in? He only, “who confesseth and forsaketh them, shall have mercy*.” The direction therefore is, “If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and

* Prov. xxviii. 13.

go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift*." Try also what can be done, in various other ways, towards counteracting the mischief of which you have been the occasion in society. Let your influence be exerted in a bold and vigorous opposition to sin and to every pernicious principle; and by the most zealous efforts desire to recommend and promote the cause of real religion. If, as you may fear, many may ascribe their ruin to you, the more assiduously you should labour to do good, and to save the souls that are ready to perish.

Such views and dispositions, as we have here described to be essentially requisite in true repentance, are produced only by a divine agency. It is the effectual operation of the Holy Spirit, which "convinces the world of sin†," which excites a just abhorrence of it, and which gives deliverance from its power. The sinner indeed should be addressed and reasoned with, admonished and instructed: the strongest representations of his guilt and danger should be set before him, and the most forcible methods used to awaken his conscience. But in these our endeavours to reclaim and convert, we should remember that all our expostulations will be inefficacious, unless the Lord be pleased to employ us as his instruments; and on Him therefore our dependence

* Matt. v. 23, 24.

† John xvi. 8.

should be placed. He works by means, and by such means as are adapted to the constitution of our nature. He deals with men as rational and free agents; he calls to them as such, and by argument and exhortation he inclines their wills to obey, not compels them by violence. He commands them to repent, that they may be convinced of their obligations to do so; he entreats their ready compliance with these injunctions, for it must be voluntary on their part; and he teaches them to ask and expect the necessary assistance from Him. Whether this representation appear to us consistent or no, it is that which the sacred scriptures every where give. If we are sufficient of ourselves to turn to God, how shall we interpret such passages as these? —“ Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance:” —“ Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life:” —“ If God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth *.” Our pious Reformers framed the services of the church under a conviction of the necessity of this divine influence; and therefore they taught us to pray, “ That it may please thee to give us true repentance †.”

How interesting is the subject to every sinner,

* Acts v. 31. xi. 18. 2 Tim. ii. 25.

† Litany, and Absolution.

that is, to every child of Adam ! It concerns, not merely the most abandoned of our species, but all who have transgressed ; in which description we are all included. And the irrevocable sentence is passed, “ Except we repent, we shall all likewise perish *.” Nay, as often as we offend, our repentance should be renewed ; and therefore it is a duty to be practised daily. Real Christians indeed may in one sense be called “ the just persons, who need no repentance †,” as having already experienced that first great work and entire renovation of heart, which is not afterwards to be repeated : yet even in their highest attainments they will perceive fresh reasons continually, why they should “ abhor themselves and repent in dust and ashes ‡.” Thus, from a persuasion of deplorable deficiencies every day, we should labour to maintain a deep humiliation and sincere contrition in the habitual frame of our minds.

But despondency need not, ought not, to be encouraged. No true penitent shall perish. Every command from God to turn to him implies a readiness on his part to receive us. But he has not left us to collect this by doubtful inferences ; he has explicitly declared it in language the most forcible, and yet the most tender and affecting. “ Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts : and let him return

* Luke xiii. 3.

† Luke xv. 7.

‡ Job xlii. 6.

unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon *.” —“ Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die ? saith the Lord God : and not that he should return from his ways and live † ?” Jehovah himself is represented as listening with compassionate regard to the cries of the penitent : He says, “ My bowels are troubled for him ; I will surely have mercy upon him ‡ .” —“ There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth ;” inasmuch as he, that “ was dead, is alive again, was lost, and is found § .”

Let not these declarations of rich and extensive mercy be so understood as to subvert the foundation of the gospel. The repentance, which is absolutely necessary, and to which the promise of forgiveness is annexed, will not expiate our guilt. It is our bounden duty, but it makes no compensation for past failures. If the holy scriptures speak of it as acceptable to God, we must remember that it is the sacrifice of the blood of Christ, which hath opened the way of access to Him, and which alone can render our contrition or amendment valuable or well-pleasing in his sight. No promise whatever is made to fallen man, but on the ground of the Saviour’s mediation ; to whom therefore the penitent is directed to flee, and upon whose perfect obedience he is encouraged to depend.

* Isaiah lv. 7.

† Ezek. xviii. 23.

‡ Jer. xxxi. 20.

§ Luke xv. 10, 32.

The important work is not to be delayed. "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts *." The present is the most proper time, and the only season, which you can fix upon. Whilst you procrastinate, you betray an unwillingness to repent; and, though you are planning and resolving to be good, you are practising the most dangerous imposition upon yourselves. You endeavour to soothe your consciences by the fallacious pretext of intentions to reform, merely that you may indulge in sin a little longer: and if you say, "Go thy way for this time," you will probably never find "a convenient season †." You may be suddenly cut down; or, if spared, you may be deprived of understanding; or, even if life and reason be continued, no such gracious offers may hereafter be made you: the Spirit of God will be grieved, and you may be given up to final obduracy. Let your present convictions, then, be faithfully regarded; and no longer stop your ears against the voice of conscience and of God. "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die ‡?"

* Heb. iii. 15.

† Acts xxiv. 25.

‡ Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

ESSAY XLI.

ON THE NATURE OF FAITH IN CHRIST.

PART I.

Faith constitutes a prominent part of the christian character. How we receive the witness of men—how that of God—and on what ground our belief rests.—What God has revealed—Redemption by Christ the main subject—What faith is, with reference to this—It is not a mere assent to the gospel,—or a general persuasion of facts and doctrines,—or a full assurance.—It does not include obedience, but produces it.

IN prosecution of the plan we laid down, we are contemplating the character of man as recovered to God. It has already appeared, that being enlightened and regenerated by the gracious influences of the Holy Spirit he is become a true penitent. Many other parts of the christian character remain to be considered : but there is none more frequently insisted on, none more appropriate than the principle of “ Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ,” which is now to engage our notice. This is of so much consequence in our

system as to demand a full discussion: for the participation of all the blessings of redemption depends upon it; the support and progress of the spiritual life are essentially connected with it. Let it be our object, not only to investigate its nature, but to enquire after its existence and effects within ourselves, and to pray for its confirmation and increase. It is professed indeed by all nominal Christians, and yet we fear it is but little understood. Much has been said and written on the subject in a spirit of vehement and angry disputation, which has been the bane of religion and the triumph of infidelity. We may have occasion to advert to these hurtful controversies, but let us endeavour to avoid all vain speculations and warm debates, and treat the point, as we ought, with the most serious and practical application to ourselves.

It is not difficult to ascertain the meaning of the word FAITH, when applied to our common concerns; and we feel that the thing itself is of absolute necessity in almost all the various transactions of human life. It is simply, "giving credit to the testimony of another," and always has reference to some declaration expressed or implied. We are obliged to depend upon the information of our fellow-creatures; for our own personal observation and experience reach but a little way; and our knowledge by intuition is much more contracted. According to the infor-

mation we receive, we lay our plans and proceed to the execution. Where there is no apparent motive for fraud, we do not usually call in question the accounts and assurances of each other; but, notwithstanding human ignorance, fallibility, weakness, and treachery, we are in the habit of yielding assent and exercising mutual reliance; and were not this the case, there would be an end of all social intercourse, of the commerce, and even the civilities of the world. “We receive the witness of men*,” not indeed implicitly, but with greater or less confidence, as we are persuaded of their knowledge, competence, and veracity. We are satisfied with probable evidence in our common affairs, where it would be absurd to require intuitive perception or absolute demonstration.

As to the present life, then, we act by faith, and we understand the principle. We believe that things exist and occurrences take place, which we never saw with our eyes: we expect and hope for advantages, which are promised us by others; we forebode and dread inflictions of evil, which are threatened. Do we act so, with respect to the concerns of the soul and the invisible world? On these subjects it is more indispensably necessary to depend upon testimony; for what can we know or discover by ourselves?

* 1 John v. 9.

How thankful should we be for such information, as may be safely credited ! But who is qualified to be our instructor, except the Lord Almighty ? If He vouchsafe to teach us, all doubt and hesitation should be banished from our minds : we should admit and act upon his declarations with full persuasion and implicit confidence. “ If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater.” It is the office of faith to credit revelation on the testimony of Jehovah : and the foundation of this, which may properly be called divine faith, is the strongest possible. It rests on the immutable perfections of the Deity, his wisdom, power, equity, truth, and goodness. “ **THUS SAITH THE LORD,**” is enough to satisfy the believer, whatever difficulties may perplex his mind or obstruct his path.

Our business is to ascertain the reality, the truth, the authenticity, and the plain obvious meaning of the revelation transmitted to us. This being done, we should yield an entire and cordial assent to all its declarations of facts and doctrines. We are not at liberty to speculate upon it, or to urge such objections as might arise from our ignorance or dislike. We should admit its principles, not as being discoverable by reason or from other sources of information, nor because they are maintained by learned men and eminent philosophers ; for our assent should

rest upon the veracity of God alone, and not upon human authority.

Divine faith will also receive with equal confidence all the various parts of revelation. One truth may be more important, but it cannot be more certain, than others. No clear and decided assertion of the word of God can be purposely rejected or disbelieved, without “making Him a liar.” Alas! how many are hereby convicted of infidelity! They select their favourite passages and doctrines of the Bible, to which they are willing to give attention, but neglect others, which may bring unwelcome tidings or bear hard upon their prevailing tempers and practices. The case is no better with those, who may not doubt of or object to any part of the sacred scriptures, but who treat the whole with perfect indifference, who never seriously examine their contents, or feel any interest in the declarations of heaven; for on no principle whatever can these persons be allowed to possess the least measure of faith.

What, then, hath God revealed in his word? What are the things which he requires us to believe?—He has given us explicit information of many former events, which would otherwise have been unknown, or transmitted to us with extreme uncertainty. Thus we are favoured with an infallible history of the Creation, the Fall, the Deluge, and the divine government of the

world for several thousand years*. We are acquainted also with important transactions, and with invisible realities, in the present day. We are furnished with a clew to guide us in the investigation of human affairs, which would otherwise perplex and confound us. The great scheme of Providence is placed before us: we see the Almighty upon his throne superintending, directing, and controlling all things: the world of spirits, both good and evil, is laid open to our view, and we are assured of their agency and influence throughout the earth. Thus “faith is the evidence of things not seen †:” it impresses the mind with a strong conviction and full persuasion of their existence. Here likewise futurity is unfolded to us. We are instructed in the general plan of the divine administration to the end of time: it is put beyond a doubt that God will raise the dead, and judge the world in righteousness; and we know with the certainty of demonstration, that he will assign to all men according to their characters an eternal state of unspeakable happiness or misery. What inexhaustible treasures of wisdom are here provided for us! And faith is that, which brings us into the possession of this rich fund of information.

But there is one subject more prominent than any other in the sacred scriptures: one that

* Heb. xi. 3.

† Heb. xi. 1.

meets our eye in every part, one to which the inspired writers continually direct our attention, on which they insist with holy fervour and delight, and with diction peculiarly sublime : it is that, to which all others are comparatively trifling, or rather are intended to be subservient. The redemption of fallen man by Jesus Christ is “the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the ending,” the sum and substance of all divine revelation. “This is the witness of God,” said the beloved apostle, as if all others were comprised in this, “which He hath testified of his Son.”—“And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life ; and this life is in his Son*.” The whole system of Christianity may thus be reduced to one simple proposition ; and so it is reduced by the man who of all others best understood it ; for he describes it as “a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners †.” This is “the word of truth, the gospel of our salvation ‡.”

Here indeed many particulars are included. The fall, the guilt, the depravity, the condemnation, and helplessness of man ; the person, the offices, the work, and the benefits, both of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Redeemer, and of God the Spirit as the Sanctifier of his people ; the

* 1 John v. 9, 11.

† 1 Tim. i. 15.

‡ Eph. i. 13.

freedom, the extent, and efficacy of divine grace; the promises, the perfection, and the immutability of the new covenant;—these are only so many parts of the same system, into which the apostolic declaration may be resolved, “That Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures *.”

This then is the subject about which Faith will be chiefly occupied, and to which its highest and most cordial regard will be paid. Many things in it may appear mysterious, but Faith yields its implicit assent, and upon the evidence of THUS SAITH THE LORD it is “fully persuaded” of their truth. Jesus Christ is the grand object, which it is required to contemplate, and it contemplates Him with admiration, affiance, gratitude, and love. “Unto you which believe He is precious †.” You, who credit the report of man’s sinful and ruinous condition, will scarcely reject the testimony concerning this glorious Deliverer, but listen with avidity and joy to those “good tidings, which publish salvation.”

Many pretend to possess this faith, and yet, as we fear, deceive themselves. It may be necessary to detect their hypocrisy or delusion; and with that view we remark, that faith receives the divine record unequivocally and without reserve, not only as to the REALITY, but as to the QUALITY, of the objects proposed. It believes

* 1 Cor. xv. 3.

† 1 Pet. ii. 7.

them to be what they are declared in the scriptures, and will therefore be accompanied with correspondent affections. It will consider sin as infinitely hateful, and the Saviour as transcendently glorious and excellent. Accordingly, where this principle is firmly rooted, the former will be dreaded and resisted, the latter will be eagerly desired and accepted. Hence it is not a cold and barren assent, but a practical conviction, which will produce an influence and an effect, in proportion to its degree.

The true believer, then, rests not in a general persuasion of the truth of revelation, but fixes his regard on the main subject, and being assured "that the Son of God is come," he is disposed to yield Him all that reverence and subjection, that trust and reliance, which are due to his character. While he realizes the promises of the gospel, he looks for a speedy possession of the blessings, and feels hope, and confidence, and joy springing up in his heart.

Such is the nature, and such the peculiar exercise of faith, as it respects the Lord Jesus Christ; and that is the faith, on which our spiritual and eternal interests depend. According to the various descriptions given of it, it is an application of the soul to Him, who proposes himself to us; it is an appropriation of his benefits. It "comes to him," as he stands inviting us;—it "receives him," as the inestimable gift of heaven;—it

“ trusts him,” as a faithful friend, and “ commits to him” all its concerns ;—it “ leans on him,” as a strong support ;—it “ follows him” as an infallible guide ;— it “ runs or flies to him,” as he is a place of refuge and a secure retreat ;—it “ eats his flesh, and drinks his blood ;”—and “ feeds upon this living bread,” as the only sufficient sustenance of the soul.

This therefore is the principle, which enters into the daily habits and experience of the Christian. It is the spring of his most holy tempers, exertions, attainments, and consolations. He lives,—he walks,—he stands,—he perseveres,—he fights,—he conquers and triumphs, BY FAITH. And the whole of this results from simply and sincerely crediting or receiving the witness of God, and giving full confidence to his representations. Let his testimony have its due weight, and we shall experience within ourselves “ the substance” or reality “ of things hoped for,” and “ the evidence” or full conviction and persuasion “ of things not seen,” however remote or improbable, if only they be declared or promised by Him “ who cannot lie.”

The subject must be resumed, but from this short account some observations and inferences may be drawn, which will tend to counteract certain errors and prevent fatal delusions. If such then be the faith, which is necessary and sufficient for our salvation, we remark,

1. It is more than a mere assent, resulting from the influence of education, or a conformity with prevailing opinions. Many are content to take up with the creed of their fathers, whatever it may be, without examination, and therefore without any real conviction of its truth. They have been taught to say "I believe;" and, their minds not being disturbed with any doubts, they too hastily conclude themselves believers. Others in like manner will follow the religion of their country; because they live among those, who profess a regard to Christ, they will be Christians too, and thus they admit the whole gospel upon trust, without denying or questioning any one of its tenets. This however is not faith, but credulity: it is receiving the witness of men, but not that of God.

2. It is more than a general persuasion of the facts and doctrines contained in the scriptures. A sort of credit may be given to these, just as to any historical narration, without any one correspondent principle or affection in the heart. In this sense men may be orthodox without faith; and we fear that not a few are loud and bitter in their invectives against heretics and infidels, and satisfy themselves that they are in no danger of being condemned for unbelief, merely because their religious system is perfectly scriptural, though they are not practically influenced by any one of their professed opinions. But the testimony of God

concerning his Son is not truly credited, where Jesus Christ is not exclusively depended on and supremely regarded, where his salvation is not eagerly desired, implored, and sought for. We do not believe in Him, as to any spiritual benefit if he be not the object of our trust, our hope, and our love. Alas ! how defective is the Christianity of vast multitudes in the Christian world !

3. It is not assurance. Its tendency doubtless is to produce that lively expectation of the divine favour, which will issue in a full confidence. But this confidence is not itself the faith of which we speak, nor is it necessarily included in it ; nay, it is a totally distinct thing. In the grand concerns of our souls, the proposition to be first admitted is not, that Christ died for me, or that I am accepted of God in Christ. These may afterwards be proved by proper testimony, and may then be credited. “ The Spirit itself may bear witness with our spirit, that we are the sons of God *.” “ We may have confidence toward God, and assure our hearts before him †.” But the plain declaration to be primarily regarded is, that “ Christ died for the ungodly, and is set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood.” If we make application upon this ground, we shall not be rejected ; the blessing will be ours. But till this application be made,

* Rom. viii. 16.

† 1 John iii. 19, 21.

we have no authority to conclude, as some have taught men to say, "Christ is mine," and "Salvation is mine:" for this would be an assertion without evidence. Do not many, however, rashly presume that they are partakers of the christian faith, only because they possess an unshaken confidence, the foundation of which they will not examine, and which therefore, to say no worse, is extremely suspicious? And do not others shew an equal ignorance of the subject, in determining against themselves as unbelievers, to their own exceeding detriment and distress, for no reason except this, that they cannot, as some do, banish from their minds all doubt of their salvation.

4. It does not include obedience but produces it. The two must be united in the same character, but they are perfectly distinct, and should be considered apart. They differ in nature and in office, and are no more the same thing than cause and effect. We shall afterwards have occasion to prove, that the faith of Christ is not compatible with a contempt or neglect of the divine law: but it disclaims all dependence upon it. There are those, who with great confusion of ideas and with much danger to the interests of religion, join faith and good works together, as if they were not to be distinguished in order of time, or as if the same efficacy were

ascribed to them, and they were equally to be regarded in the grand business of our justification. The intent of such a system is to introduce a partial dependence at least upon our own righteousness, and to rob the Saviour of his glory. We cannot therefore be too careful in ascertaining clearly and exactly, what christian faith is, and what is its appropriate concern in our salvation. It must necessarily precede all holy duties, though if opportunity be given the good seed will spring up and produce those excellent fruits, "which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God." But in its highest state of vigour and attainment it will disclaim the best obedience, and even itself too, abhorring all pretensions to merit, in the justification of the soul.

How unspeakably important is this subject ! Of what sort is the faith, which we possess ? Whence did it originate ? And what does it bring forth ? Let each one judge himself, and judge impartially, as in the presence of the heart-searching God. But oh ! put not off the matter with a contemptuous sneer, as if it were of no consequence what you may believe, or as if you were at liberty to receive or to reject "the witness of God." Most assuredly your unbelief will be justly offensive to Him, as being an avowed denial or hatred of his perfections, and

will expose you to his wrath and indignation for ever. "He that believeth not, is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God *."

* John iii. 1 .

ESSAY XLII.

ON THE NATURE OF FAITH IN CHRIST.

PART II.

Faith in its more restricted sense, is fixed on the Lord Jesus Christ—as a divine Person—as becoming incarnate—performing complete obedience—offering an expiatory sacrifice—and sustaining various offices.—It includes knowledge—approbation—and reliance.

“BELIEVE on the Lord Jesus Christ,” is the grand precept of the gospel. It is a duty inculcated with peculiar earnestness by all the sacred writers; it is bound upon us by strongest obligations; the most solid and extensive advantages are attached to it; and its necessity is universal, perpetual, and indispensable. Can we help feeling a lively interest in the consideration of such a subject? And will it not be expedient to enter into a more minute and ample discussion?

We are investigating its nature and appropriate exercises. A general account has been given: it is now proposed to be more particular. Faith,

we have seen, may respect every declaration of God ; but that faith, which justifies the sinner, is more confined, it is restricted to the one point, which constitutes the substance of revelation,—the redemption of fallen man by Jesus Christ. Here then

I. We enquire, What is its object, or on what is it fixed ? The answer is not difficult. It has immediate reference to the Saviour ; and it is most generally described by believing IN or UPON Him. There have been many true witnesses, whose testimony is worthy of credit ; but we are not required to trust in them, as we are in the prophet from heaven. The legislator Moses, and the apostle Paul were eminent teachers and patterns of religion ; but they never proposed themselves to any as the foundation of hope. Our faith must not rest even upon the best of men : nor must the Almighty God himself be its object, considered absolutely, without a Mediator ; for we have no promise from him, and can possess no confidence towards him, but through Christ. He has made many declarations of his will, which should be implicitly received. “ I believe God,” said St. Paul with respect to a particular deliverance, “ that it shall be even as it was told me *.” So we understand the faith of miracles, as a confident expectation

* Acts xxvii. 25.

of performing some extraordinary operation, grounded on a particular revelation. But if the salvation of the soul be the point in question, then we are referred immediately to the Lord Jesus Christ, as undertaking for us this great concern, and we are required to fix and maintain our entire and exclusive dependence upon Him. It is true, we sometimes read of believing in God; but this must be interpreted in consistency with the plan of redemption, by which the way of access to the Father is opened for us through the Son. Thus we are taught, that “by Christ we believe in God:” and while the Saviour says, “Ye believe in God,” he adds, “Believe also in me;” and assigns as a reason, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me*.”

By faith in Christ we shall regard him, as possessing all the perfections of Deity, and as having been from eternity “God over all, blessed for ever.” Such glory is ascribed to him; and we ought not to question the divine testimony, however mysterious. The record of the scriptures concerning him is clear and unequivocal. They declare, that “His goings forth have been from of old, FROM EVERLASTING;—that He and the Father are one;—and that being in the form of God he thought it not robbery to be equal

* Eph. ii. 18. 1 Pet. i. 21. John xiv. 1, 6.

with God *.” They command us to be baptized and to be blessed, in his name †; and thus they teach us to worship him, and to expect all spiritual blessings from him. They require us to devote ourselves to his service, and so to trust him, as no creature can be depended on. To all these scriptures we must refuse our assent, or in other words reject the witness of God, and make Him a liar, unless we admit the Godhead of Jesus Christ: and on the supposition that He is very God, we cannot believe in him truly, our faith is defective and radically wrong, if we deny him his essential glory. Then hear his warning voice, “If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins ‡.” If you refuse to admit the unequivocal declaration, that “the Word was in the beginning with God and was God §,” shall you not incur the condemnation of an unbeliever?

Faith more especially regards the Redeemer as becoming incarnate,—“God manifested in the flesh,”—assuming the human nature, and fixing for a time his tabernacle upon the earth. It was thus only, “by taking the manhood into God,” that he was capable of transacting our concerns, and of mediating for us. How could he otherwise appear as our representative, to obey and to

* Micah v. 2. John x. 30. Phil. ii. 6.

† Matt. xxviii. 19. 2 Cor. xiii. 14.

‡ John viii. 24.

§ John i. 1.

suffer for us, and thus give us confidence towards God? He was “made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law*.” This then seems the peculiar object of faith. It respects Christ as coming down to this lower world, to act on our behalf and in our stead, and therefore “taking upon him the form of a servant, and being made in the likeness of men†.” It respects him, as dwelling upon the earth in our nature, not merely at such a time and place, but for such purposes. It considers both his life and death as a firm ground of hope: his life, as exhibiting a pattern of perfect obedience to God, which will be imputed to all them that believe, and which therefore ensures their full justification;—and his death, as making a sacrifice to divine justice, by which our guilt is expiated, the condemning sentence of the law is cancelled, the fierce anger of the Lord removed, and his favour conciliated. The eye of faith is most intensely fixed upon the cross, because there it beholds the consummation of the Redeemer’s righteousness, and the propitiatory blood of his atonement. Its devout regard is directed to other parts of his work and character, to his resurrection and intercession; but they are connected with the cross, and derive all their efficacy from it. The believer therefore takes up

* Gal. iv. 4, 5.

† Phil. ii. 7.

the words of the apostle, “ God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ * :” and then, like the Baptist, commending this wondrous and beloved object to the admiration and esteem of surrounding friends, he says, “ Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world † !”

Various are the offices, which the Lord Jesus sustains for the present advantage and the eternal salvation of his people : and it is the business of faith to acknowledge him in those offices, that is, to yield him all that reverence, submission, affiance, love, and service, which they demand. It therefore applies to him, as a PROPHET, and meekly listens to his instructions, desirous to “ seek the law at his mouth.” As he is “ the HIGH-PRIEST of our profession,” it depends upon and pleads his sacrifice and intercession. And, whilst as a KING he bears the sceptre and sits upon the throne, it ascribes to him honour and great majesty ; it bows with subjection to all his precepts and appointments, and rejoices in the security of his protection.—As he is the PHYSICIAN of the soul, it supplicates his aid, with confidence of his wisdom, power, tenderness, and care. As he is the good SHEPHERD, it hears his voice, and follows him, and expects safety and comfort in his fold and in the green

* Gal. vi. 14.

† John i. 29.

pastures of his providing. And as he is “the CAPTAIN of our salvation,” it repairs to his standard, and is encouraged to maintain the spiritual conflict, wholly relying upon his strength and fidelity for present support and final victory. — Thus also all his calls and demands, his proposals and promises, are regarded by faith, according to their nature and importance. It yields the resignation and obedience he requires, and expects from him the gifts and graces he engages to bestow. It gives a reality or subsistence to “the things hoped for,” to all the different blessings secured by his covenant, pardon, righteousness, guidance, holiness, divine fellowship, peace, perseverance, and everlasting glory. — The grand object therefore is the Saviour, and very excellent, precious, and “altogether lovely” he must appear in his person, his work, his offices, his engagements, and various relations. O “look unto Him, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for He is God, and there is none else *.”

This account has in some measure anticipated our further remarks; but such is the importance of the point before us, that it cannot be too minutely investigated. And therefore

II. We enquire, How much is implied in this principle of believing, or what particulars are

essentially necessary to constitute true christian faith? We mention three.

1. Knowledge. It is not founded in ignorance, as some would perversely represent, or as others may fondly presume; nay, it cannot subsist without a spiritual discernment. The Holy Ghost must previously enlighten our minds, must “take of the things of Christ and shew them unto us*,” before we cordially embrace the offer of the gospel. But when the Redeemer’s character is understood, when his excellency and suitableness, his ability and grace are discovered, then he will be admired, accepted, and depended on. “They that know thy name, will put their trust in thee†.” Accordingly, knowledge is often put for faith, as preparatory to it and necessarily connected with it. “By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many‡.” “We do know that we know him,” says St. John; and St. Paul prays, as for the highest blessing, “that he may know him§.” The increase of divine light in the mind, or of true knowledge, is desired for the very purpose of advancement in faith and holiness, which cannot be obtained without it. “This I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment||.”—But on the contrary, a state of

* John xvi. 15.

† Psalm ix. 10.

‡ Isa. liii. 11.

§ 1 John ii. 3. Phil. iii. 10.

|| Phil. i. 9.

spiritual ignorance is a state of unbelief and of enmity to Christ, which if persisted in must be fatal to the soul. They that know him not, cannot honour, trust, or love him; and remaining in darkness they must be for ever separated from him. O study his character: “search the scriptures;—for they are they, which testify of Him* :” pray for “the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him† :” be faithful to the light afforded you, and “then shall you know, if you follow on to know the Lord‡.” But alas! what cause have we to lament the gross ignorance of Christ, which every where prevails, and men’s stupid inattention to the calls of his gospel! “They love darkness rather than light;—they hate the light, and will not come to it§.” How unlike to the noble Bereans, of whom it is said, “they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so:—therefore many of them believed ||.”

2. Approbation. The facts of the gospel history must be credited, the nature and terms of the salvation proposed must be understood. But faith in Christ implies more than this. It supposes that objections to his plans and offers are removed, that what he tenders is considered as

* John v. 39.

† Eph. i. 17.

‡ Hos. vi. 3.

§ John iii. 19, 20.

|| Acts xvii. 11, 12.

suitable, is desired as needful, and admired as excellent. Is it to be imagined, that we shall accept of that, which appears not to be adapted to our case; that we shall apply for that, which we do not want; or that we shall make painful sacrifices for the attainment of that, which we account of little or no value? But while faith sees the gracious provision of the gospel for the relief of our necessities, it stretches forth the hand to receive it; with a consciousness of guilt and depravity, it acknowledges that the Saviour, who proposes both to justify and to sanctify, is exactly calculated to meet the exigencies of the case; it contemplates with delight the fulness and freeness of that grace, which he has manifested; it admires the plan of mercy, so wonderfully contrived to display the perfections and secure the glory of God, as well as to promote the best and final happiness of man; and it deliberately prefers the blessings, which Christ bestows, to every other possession or enjoyment.

Many dislike and object to this salvation on various accounts. To the proud advocates for the sufficiency of their own reason and their own righteousness it is too humiliating; to the worldling and the sensualist it is too spiritual and holy, and their disapprobation evinces that they are destitute of faith. But the true believer says, "The plan is excellent and glorious: it is well ordered in all things: the benefits it holds forth

are such as I want and account inestimably precious : I cannot purchase them at too high a rate, though I must receive them as a free gift : my friends, my reputation, my property, my ease, and my life itself, if necessary, I will relinquish for this “ pearl of great price :”—“ Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ *.”

Where a contrary estimate is formed, the whole report of the gospel is not sincerely credited : and therefore no wonder, that men dispute, and cavil, and reject salvation. While their minds are so blinded and vitiated, “ there is no beauty in him, that they should desire him †.” “ They savour not the things that be of God, but those that be of men ‡.” This is the chief cause of their unbelief.

3. Reliance. Faith is the entire dependence of the soul upon Jesus Christ for pardon and acceptance with God, and for all spiritual blessings, according to the promises of the new covenant. Every other hope is abandoned, but that which springs from Him ; he alone is rested upon as all-sufficient, and his mediation is pleaded with humble confidence before God. Without this dependence, no knowledge, no approbation of

* Phil. iii. 8.

† Isa. liii. 2.

‡ Matt. xvi. 23.

Christ will be of any avail : it is the very essence of that faith, to which salvation is attached ; and where this is not produced, “ the witness of God which He hath testified of his Son ” is not cordially received. This is the application of redemption, the appropriation of the Saviour’s merit, which hereby becomes our own. When we can thus trust him with the care of our souls, and commit all our concerns into his hands, He will undertake for us, and his righteousness will be put upon us. This reliance is not a vain confidence, or an ungrounded presumption. It is built upon a firm basis, the promise and the oath of Jehovah, the power and the grace of Immanuel, the obedience, the sacrifice, and intercession of our great High-priest. In proportion as these are credited and apprehended, will be the strength of our dependence. It may exist therefore in different degrees.

There are those, who seem to doubt of the disposition of Christ to receive them, and come to him with trembling steps, crying, “ Lord, IF THOU WILT, thou CANST make me clean *.” But even a weak faith, fixed upon the right foundation, though much obstructed by unbelief, will be efficacious to the saving of the soul ; the divine promise has engaged for it. In this, however, every thing but Christ will be re-

* Matt. viii. 2.

nounced as a ground of reliance in the great business of salvation. All our performances and attainments, all our fancied excellencies, our graces and our usefulness, must be put away, as unworthy to be mentioned before God. If any thing of our own form a part of our trust, "Christ shall profit us nothing."—"He is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law, (or who expect to be so) ye are fallen from grace*." May every reader be enabled to say, "I through the law am dead to the law;—and the life, which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me;"—desiring only to be "found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith†!"

What an ample field is here opened, not for curious discussion, but for practical enquiries, and close examination! What do we understand of this divine principle? What is our hope, our plea, and expectation, in the prospect of death and of the final judgment? What is it that supports our souls, when we extend our views to eternity? Is our foundation sure? Is our faith fixed, exclusively fixed, upon Jesus Christ, as

* Gal. v. 2, 4,

† Gal. ii. 19, 20. Phil. iii. 9.

“made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him*?” Have we fled to him “for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us †?” We do not otherwise “believe with the heart unto righteousness,” except He be our “all in all.”

Whatever may have been our character and conduct, how great soever our guilt and depravity, we are encouraged to place such an unreserved dependence upon Christ by very forcible considerations. He is abundantly qualified for the work he has undertaken, the redemption of our souls; he possesses divine perfections, and nothing can be too hard for him; he hath performed a complete obedience to the law; having made reconciliation by his own blood, he is gone into heaven to plead the merit of his sacrifice; and he hath received the gifts of the Holy Spirit for the entire sanctification of his people. Who then shall entertain a doubt, that “he is able to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him ‡?”

But may we so come? Yes, he has himself invited us: “WHOSOEVER WILL, let him take the water of life freely §”: and if we be oppressed with a conviction of sin, as with a burden too grievous to be borne, we are addressed with peculiar tenderness, and are assured of a welcome reception; for He says, “Come unto me all ye

* 2 Cor. v. 21.

† Heb. vi. 18.

‡ Heb. vii. 25.

§ Rev. xxii. 17.

that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*.” He declares, that he will not reject the sincere and humble application of any penitent. How gracious are his words, “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out†.” Thousands have experienced his compassionate regard and his power to save; and none ever trusted in him, and were confounded.

Exceeding great and precious promises are given us, “that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have eternal life‡.” These are all “yea and amen,” certain and inviolable, fixed and immoveable as the throne of God. “Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from them, till all be fulfilled§.” But if we refuse to place our whole confidence in him, who is so mighty and so willing to save, we treat the most solemn declarations of the God of truth as if they were a lie; and then his fidelity is pledged to verify his own word in our everlasting condemnation. “He that believeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him||.”

* Matt. xi. 28.

† John vi. 37.

‡ John iii. 16.

§ Matt. v. 18.

|| John iii. 36.

ESSAY XLIII.

ON JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH.

PART I.

The advantages of faith considered—chiefly in justification; which is—a gracious act of God—a blessing procured by the obedience of Christ,—received and enjoyed only by faith.—That we are justified by faith alone,—and not by the moral law,—nor by a new remedial law,—nor by faith and works together.

HAVING stated the nature of Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we proceed to consider its advantages, the high privileges attached to it, and the practical effects which it produces. This opens to us a subject of large extent and of unspeakable importance. How much is ascribed to the principle of believing, both in its beginning and in its progress! In its very first exercise it brings salvation to them, that are ready to perish. This it does by virtue of that union with the Saviour, and that interest in Him, to which it introduces

them. They “come to him;” they “receive him;” they are “one with him, and he with them;” they “dwell in him, and he in them;” they “are complete in him,” as being partakers of all his benefits. They “have the Son,” and therefore they “have life,—everlasting life.” Such are the descriptions of the happy change in their state, which immediately results from their application to him. They are “justified by faith, without the deeds of the law*.”

This is the only way, in which any one of our guilty race can now obtain acceptance with his offended God. Every other way is barred against him; but this is freely opened through the exceeding riches of divine grace.—“To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness†.” The momentous question, “How should man be just with God?” is here resolved; and the answer is full, decided, and perspicuous. The Christian is not innocent: he has sinned, and in his natural or unregenerate state he is “ungodly:” he cannot therefore possess any righteousness of his own, at all equal to the demands of God’s holy law: but he receives one, adequate and complete, not by a course of obedience, for “he worketh not;” and the “righteousness,” for which he is accepted, is not inherent

* Rom. iii. 28.

† Rom. iv. 5.

in himself; it is “reckoned” or “imputed” to him. Thus he is considered and dealt with, as if no guilt attached to him: and this amazing alteration in his circumstances is accomplished simply by his “believing,” or his entire dependence on another, “believing on Him that justifieth the ungodly.”

Such is the first access of a sinner to God, and such the gracious reception he meets with, through the righteousness of his Redeemer. His justification takes place upon his application to Christ, without the intervention of delay. How important a consideration! It should arrest the attention of every man, and excite in him the most anxious enquiry, “Is this blessedness mine?” Or “may I indulge the hope of attaining it?” Justification is a subject, which comprises in it, or involves in its consequences, all that is essential in our religion: our best comforts and dearest expectations, our present and everlasting happiness, depend upon it. May the divine Spirit give us a right understanding in it, and render it, what it should be to us, the source of solid peace and unspeakable consolation! The principal points will come under discussion, while we consider, By whom is the blessing bestowed, How procured, and In what way received and enjoyed? We ask,

I. By whom is it bestowed? An apostle replies with the most satisfactory decision, “It is

God that justifieth*.” It is an act appropriate to himself, what no creature can pretend to; it is the gracious act, and high prerogative, of the almighty Sovereign, to “justify the ungodly.”

It is not difficult to ascertain the meaning of the term. It supposes a charge of guilt adduced, an accusation preferred, which is not allowed; or if allowed, it is as completely done away, as if it had never been brought. The sentence of the court, therefore, respecting the person arraigned, is not that of condemnation, but of entire absolution. He is “justified,” or in other words he is “accounted righteous.” Shall it be said, that he is merely forgiven, and his punishment remitted? “The Lord will not impute sin” unto him, but “imputeth righteousness†.” Is he put upon his trial according to the divine law? A plea is alleged and admitted, by which it is declared that he is now right or just, even according to the demands of that law. The decree is pronounced: he is not considered as an offender, but as having yielded a perfect obedience, which entitles him to a positive reward, even to the favour of his God and to all the felicities of heaven.

Now such a decision can be made only by the supreme and omnipotent Ruler, who alone can adjust the measures of his own government, or

* Rom. viii. 33.

† Rom. iv. 6, 8.

understand what may be expedient and honourable for Him to require or allow. To Him we are accountable for our conduct; and, however we may have transgressed, if He be pleased to declare, that the sentence against us is reversed, and that He can “be just, and the justifier of Him which believeth in Jesus*,” then we may exclaim, with a lively confidence and holy exultation, “Who is he that condemneth†?” The method also, by which this can be effected, must be the contrivance of his own infinite wisdom, and the result of his sovereign and abundant grace. Man can have no share either in the design or the execution of the plan. It is such, as he could not have thought of, or have presumed to propose. Nay, he resists it, because it pays no compliment to him, but requires him to ascribe all the glory to the undeserved mercy of his God. “We are justified FREELY BY HIS GRACE‡:”—and, “being justified by his grace, we are made heirs according to the hope of eternal life§.” This is surely more than a deliverance from punishment: He assigns us a place in his family; he gives us the inheritance of children; and bestows upon us the recompence of everlasting glory.—Have we obtained the blessing? Or do we solicit it with unremitting importunity? What means that stupid indifference, as if it

* Rom. iii. 26.

† Rom. viii. 34.

‡ Rom. iii. 24.

§ Titus iii. 7.

were of no moment to you? Or that supercilious contempt of it, as if to you it were perfectly unnecessary? What is the ground of your confidence? Or why do you presume, that you are the objects of God's favour, as being just in his sight? Then ask,

II. How is it procured? By whom, and on what terms? Man himself, by reason of his moral impotence, is utterly excluded from all share in the work. It were absurd for him, so guilty and depraved, to plead any merit or worthiness of his own, on account of which he might claim the reward of righteousness. But One of exalted dignity, and fully competent to the arduous task, hath interposed, and undertaken to obtain by his own merit an honourable acceptance for us with our offended God. We are accordingly assured, that to Him alone the Lord God has regard in the exercise of his mercy, and entirely for the sake of what He has done and suffered "justifies the ungodly."

Our attention is directed to the person of the Mediator as the sole procurer of our justification. "BY HIM all that believe are justified from all things." Therefore "we seek to be justified BY CHRIST:" and He is "the Lord, IN WHOM all the seed of Israel shall be justified, and shall glory*." Still the question recurs, What does

* Acts xiii. 39. Gal. ii. 17. Isaiah xlv. 25.

He offer ? What plea does He urge on our behalf, to which the Father pays respect ? And to this the clearest and most decided answer is given. It is “THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST,” or the perfect obedience which he yielded to the law in our place and as our representative, which is accepted for us, and by faith imputed to us. Perhaps our pride may dispose us to object to this appointment : but our reasonings are fallacious. It should satisfy us, that God hath declared it to be the plan of his own wisdom, that it is consistent with and displays his own glory, that no other can be allowed, and that it claims the perfect acquiescence and grateful admiration of man. This is “THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD;” of which such very excellent things are spoken throughout the sacred oracles, which both prophets and apostles celebrate in sublimest language, which they propose to our acceptance, and in which the most eminent saints have trusted and rejoiced. It is the righteousness, which God himself has provided, which he will admit and reward as if it were the personal obedience of his believing people, and which the Redeemer, who is God, has “brought in” for their complete justification. Thus we are assured, “By the obedience of one shall many be made righteous :—For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth :—being made

sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him *."

Sometimes our acceptance with God is ascribed to the DEATH of his Son: "We are justified by his blood †." But this is not to be understood as exclusive of his perfectly holy life, which we call his meritorious obedience; but rather as being the consummation, the last and highest act of that obedience, by which he fulfilled the demands of the law to the very utmost. In the cross, then, we behold not only an expiatory sacrifice, but the completion of that righteousness, which our representative performed, and which merits for us the divine favour and everlasting glory.

In one passage the blessing is spoken of as procured for us by the RESURRECTION of the Saviour: "He was raised again for our justification ‡." That event gave the clearest evidence, that he had finished his work in righteousness, and that through him a way was opened for us to approach the Father with confidence and joy. Had he not risen, the whole plan would have failed, what he had done and suffered would have availed nothing, the sentence of the law would have remained against us, and our justification would have been impossible.

* Rom. v. 19. x. 4. 2 Cor. v. 21.

† Rom. v. 9.

‡ Rom. iv. 25.

To Him therefore, who was “obedient unto death,” and by his resurrection was declared to be accepted as our surety, we are encouraged to look up with lively hope, since “there is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus*.” Hence we enquire,

III. In what way is it obtained and enjoyed? We have seen, that God himself of his own free and sovereign mercy proposes to receive sinners to his favour, his presence, and his glory; but that in doing this he has regard to the righteousness of his Son, who undertakes to mediate for us, and who has “magnified the law and made it honourable” by his own voluntary subjection to its demands. We are now to consider, how we come to the real participation of so great a benefit; or what is the medium, through which it is conveyed to us.

As it is altogether a gratuitous gift on God’s part, we must not presume to bring a price in our hands, or to offer any thing of our own as an equivalent. We must humbly apply for and thankfully accept it. The terms we must leave to the Donor: He alone has a right to appoint them; and He has done it in the clearest and most satisfactory manner. He has declared, that as he is “well pleased” with the righteousness of Jesus Christ, he requires in every applicant

* Rom. viii. 1.

an entire submission to it, or an unreserved dependence upon it. No other trust can be allowed to intrude, no other plea to be offered: but to such a reliance on the Saviour, where all personal merit is renounced, the blessing is promised and infallibly secured: that is, we are “justified BY FAITH WITHOUT THE DEEDS OF THE LAW *.”

This faith, as we have already remarked, presupposes a spiritual understanding of the character, the dignity, and the grace of Christ, and it is so essentially connected with it, that the one is sometimes put for the other. Those, who believe in him, are such as know him, and none but such are interested in his righteousness. It is accordingly declared by the Father, “BY HIS KNOWLEDGE shall my righteous servant justify many †.” This is not a different representation, but the same, and it affirms only, that men shall obtain the benefit of his obedience by means of a just perception of his mediatorial glory; for this will necessarily produce a sincere reliance upon him, a renunciation of their own righteousness, and a desire to be found in “the righteousness which is of God BY FAITH.” Well may it be called “THE EXCELLENCY OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD ‡.”

The doctrine before us is delivered in language so express and unequivocal, and in passages of

* Rom. iii. 28.

† Isa. liii. 11.

‡ Phil. iii. 8, 9.

scripture so numerous, it is a matter of wonder, that any should deny its truth, or doubt its meaning. But various attempts are made to subvert this foundation of our hope. It will be proper for us, therefore, to be upon our guard, and to furnish our minds with those strong and invincible arguments, which upon a devout and diligent investigation we shall find scattered throughout the sacred volume. The inspired writers are in perfect unison: all, all agree in the same testimony, that we become heirs of the righteousness of God by faith, and in no respect or degree by any exertions or holiness of our own. This testimony may be given more at large in a subsequent essay, by which the doctrine will appear to be established in the mouth of many witnesses. For the present it may be expedient, for the sake of obviating erroneous and perverse interpretations, to ascertain the meaning and extent of our position.

While we maintain that we are justified BY FAITH, we wish it to be understood, that faith is not here considered as an act of obedience (though in strict propriety it be so), for no work of our's is regarded of God in the grant of our justification. He looks upon us as altogether "without works;" and the reason assigned why this method of salvation is appointed, is, "Lest any man should boast*." Any work whatever,

* Eph. ii. 9.

if admitted as the ground or the procuring cause of our acceptance with God, would so far detract from the honour of the Redeemer; and even our faith, if so viewed, would afford us matter for exultation in ourselves. But it is the very nature and peculiar office of faith to abandon every claim on the score of merit. It asks, it expects nothing, on its own account; but it petitions the divine favour solely for the sake of Jesus Christ. In that respect only does it justify us, as it is the means of our receiving Him: it brings us to him; it produces an union with him; and we are then regarded as “THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IN HIM*.” It is therefore by or through faith, but not on account of it. Such is the distinction maintained in the eleventh article of the Church of England.

But the doctrine advanced is still stronger;—“we are justified BY FAITH ONLY:” by which we understand that no other grace has the same honourable office assigned to it. This is exclusively the channel, through which the blessing is conveyed. We do not however mean, that it can strictly be alone, or separate from other graces. Many spiritual principles and holy dispositions may exist with it; or rather, they are consequent upon it and result from it. But whatever may be its concomitants or its fruits,

* 2 Cor. v. 21.

respect is paid to itself alone in the momentous business we are now considering. To nothing else is our justification IN THE SIGHT OF GOD ever ascribed. Its effects and evidences BEFORE MEN are another point, and will be afterwards discussed.

These sentiments are stated with great force and perspicuity in the Homily upon Salvation. "Faith doth not shut out repentance, hope, love, dread, and the fear of God, to be joined with faith in every man that is justified, but it shutteth them out from the office of justifying. So that although they be all present together in him that is justified, yet they justify not altogether.—Faith also doth not shut out the justice of our good works, necessarily to be done afterwards of duty towards God (for we are most bounden to serve God, in doing good deeds, commanded by him in his holy scripture, all the days of our life:) but it excludeth them, so that we may not do them to this intent, to be made good by doing of them. For all the good works that we can do be unperfect, and therefore not able to deserve our justification: but our justification doth come freely by the meer mercy of God, and of so great and free mercy, that whereas all the world was not able of their selves to pay any part towards their ransom, it pleased our heavenly Father of his infinite mercy, without any our desert or deserving, to prepare for us the most precious

jewels of Christ's body and blood, whereby our ransom might be fully paid, the law fulfilled, and his justice fully satisfied. So that Christ is now the righteousness of all them that truly do believe in him. He for them paid their ransom by his death. He for them fulfilled the law in his life. So that now in him and by him every christian man may be called a fulfiller of the law, forasmuch as that which their infirmity lacked, Christ's justice hath supplied."

In opposition to certain prevailing and dangerous errors, we shall now only remark,

1. We are not justified by the works of the moral law, any more than by ceremonial observances. By a fashionable mode of interpretation, whatever has been said by St. Paul of the exclusion of our own obedience, is understood only of an obedience to the institutions of the Jewish ritual; as if a regard to the moral precepts, which are of universal and eternal obligation, might still furnish some plea of merit, and be admitted to some share in procuring our justification. But the apostle's argumentation equally excludes all our own works, of whatever kind they may be, and proves decisively that righteousness cannot come by any law whatever*." That the moral law was in his contemplation, at least as much as the ceremonial, when he declared, "that no

* Gal. ii. 21.

man is justified by the law in the sight of God *," we infer from the following considerations.

It is that alone, which brings all men under condemnation, according to St. Paul's conclusion, "that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God †:" no other law is binding on the whole human race. It is that, which, according to his representation, gives us "the knowledge of sin,"—which "worketh wrath,"—which is "the ministration of death and condemnation,"—and which leaves us "under the curse ‡." If that law were not comprehended in his argument, "boasting" would not be so effectually "excluded," as it now is according to his position; nor would his doctrine stand, that "the Lord hath saved us, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy §." It deserves attention also, that his brother apostle St. James gives the same account of the extensive demands and tremendous sanctions of the moral law, as affording no ground of hope to a sinner, because it requires an absolute perfection of obedience, it allows not the least violation of its precepts, but dooms the "offender in one point" to final punishment ||. That law therefore, when once broken, can never justify.

* Gal. iii. 11.

† Rom. iii. 19.

‡ Rom. iii. 20. iv. 15. 2 Cor. iii. 7, 9. Gal. iii. 10.

§ Rom. iii. 27. Eph. ii. 9. Titus iii. 5. || James ii. 10.

2. We are not justified by, what is sometimes called, “a new and a remedial law.” It is maintained by many, who are unwilling to quit their hold of human merit and their own righteousness, that we stand not now upon the old covenant, but that in the gospel dispensation a fresh code of precepts is delivered, not so rigorous as the former, and which promise a reward even to an imperfect obedience. Now, whatever acceptance or recompence may be granted to any services FOR CHRIST’S SAKE, it pertains not to the subject in question: but we argue, that God has appointed no new rule of conduct, which will license the least deviation, or give us any confidence towards Him on the ground of our own works. Are any of the ten commandments repealed? Or are we now at liberty to depart in any degree from that love to God and our neighbour, which they require? Are their demands unjust or severe? For even a partial abrogation would seem to imply, that too much had been exacted, and the standard fixed too high. What a reflection upon the wisdom, the goodness, and the equity, of our God!

But we ask, Where is this new law revealed? It has been thought by some, with much more plausibility, that our Lord, so far from mitigating the severity of former injunctions, has raised the tone of morals, and insisted on a degree of purity unknown before. Most undoubtedly, He

has not relaxed, or lowered the rule of duty. Can it be specified, what abatements are made? Or how much this new and mild system requires? It is altogether a fiction, contrived to accommodate men's carnal inclinations and self-righteous conceits, demanding from them no more strictness or exertion than what may suit their convenience, and still flattering them that their "sincere obedience" will be accepted and rewarded. This supposed remedial law allows of imperfections, that is, it allows its own precepts to be violated with impunity, contrary to all other laws, which were ever heard of: and thus it holds out an encouragement to sin. Or, if imperfections are not to be considered as sins, then we are not transgressors, and in that view have no need of the Saviour. How different from the sublime and holy system of Christianity! We add only

3. We are not justified by the co-operation or union of faith and works together. It is supposed, that, while opposite parties are formed in favour of one or the other of these as separate leaders in a violent contention, the safest way will be to join the two, and assign to each an equal share in the business of our justification. This may gratify our pride, as it secures half of the glory to ourselves, and reluctantly surrenders the other half to Christ. But so far is it from solving any difficulty in the scriptures, it contradicts the whole tenor. It is a perplexed and

ambiguous system. It is neither law nor gospel. It professes a respect to each, but it mutilates and confounds them both. They should have a distinct consideration, and be kept perfectly separate: for they can never harmonize together in the point we are considering. One or the other must be renounced, as to justification. Thus speaks the strenuous advocate for the doctrine we maintain, "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified*." It is observable here, that they stand in opposition, that three times together the law is excluded from the office, which is as often assigned to faith alone.

In another place also he argues that the two plans are incompatible. "It is of faith, that it might be by grace.—And if by grace, then it is no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace: but if it be of works, then it is no more grace; otherwise work is no more work †." Accordingly, he declares that to lean in any measure to the law, as to the point of our acceptance with God, is inconsistent with that simple and entire reliance we should place upon the Saviour, and is a virtual rejection of Him. "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified

* Gal. ii. 16.

† Rom. iv. 16. xi. 6.

by the law (or seek to be so) : ye are fallen from grace *.” O beware, lest by the profane attempt of mixing your own works (whether they may be superstitious observances, moral duties, or acts of devotion) with the righteousness of Christ, you dishonour and provoke Him, and thus be effectually cut off from all the benefits of his mediation !

The doctrine involves many momentous considerations: the subject must therefore be resumed, that it may receive a more full and minute investigation. Its truth and importance must be further shewn, cautions must be suggested, and objections answered. We bespeak the candour of our readers, entreating them not to prejudge the case, till the whole matter be laid before them, that it may be distinctly viewed in all its bearings and all its consequences.

Enough has been said to excite the gratitude and joy of believers. We exhort you to “ stand fast” and exult “ in the liberty, wherewith Christ hath made us free †.” O consider its value, and adore your gracious Benefactor ! The blessing of justification, which He hath procured and bestowed, is large as your wants. It ensures a deliverance from all condemnation ; it gives you an undeniable title to the glories of heaven ; it presents you to God without spot or blemish. The sentence of absolution is therefore irreversible : it will be confirmed and made known in the final

* Gal. v. 4.

† Gal. v. 1.

judgment; and its happy effects will extend through all eternity. With what courage, peace, and holy confidence, should this inspire your souls! Take up your words, and say, "Who shall lay any thing to our charge?" and go on your way rejoicing.

If any deem themselves unworthy of this high privilege, we would encourage their application. It is offered generally to all, and to you in particular. O come and receive it freely, as it is freely tendered to your acceptance! Do not cavil at the terms, but put forth the hand of faith, which will bring you to the immediate possession. Does not the mode of salvation proposed suit your case? It will be given you "without money and without price." You could not otherwise hope for its attainment. But the invitations and promises of the gospel are such, as may afford a sufficient ground for your liveliest expectations.

Let not careless sinners however presume upon their security. Beware, lest you die in unbelief. How will you stand in the judgment, if you be not justified? Or if you be distressed with no fears, on what do you build your confidence? Why is it, that other things engross your attention, while this important concern remains unsettled? "Arise, and call upon your God!"—"Give diligence, that you may be found of Him in peace!"

ESSAY XLIV.

ON JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH.

PART II.

Justification by Faith alone, proved from the holy scriptures to be the divine appointment,—was the doctrine of the primitive church—and is clearly established in the Church of England.—It is suitable to the fallen state of man,—humbling to the sinner,—displays the grace of God,—honours the Redeemer,—and is favourable to holiness.—The doctrine most interesting—lies at the foundation of Christianity—the rejection of it fatal.

How vain and trifling are all the questions, which divide and agitate the world, compared to that which now occupies our attention! “Where-with shall we come before the Lord?” What offering shall we bring, to conciliate his favour? May a sinner be encouraged to entertain any confidence towards him? Till these enquires be resolved in a satisfactory manner, let us not lend our minds to any inferior subjects: but

hither let all our studies and all our prayers be directed. We pity the frivolity of those, who can be solicitous about every thing but their everlasting salvation, and who obstinately refuse to make use of the only means, which can secure an event of such unspeakable moment.

A plain and distinct representation has been given of the way, revealed to us in the gospel, in which the guilty may be “accounted righteous.” JUSTIFICATION has been considered—as a gracious act of God,—as a blessing procured by the obedience of Christ,—and as a gift received and enjoyed BY FAITH ALONE. According to this doctrine it is maintained, that sinners have free access to God, and are even entitled to his favour, not as having fulfilled the law, or as having by themselves in any measure repaired the breach which sin has made, but simply as relying on the Lord Jesus Christ alone for their salvation, and entirely for the merit of his obedience. As this is a point, which many are unwilling to admit, it was proposed to resume the consideration; and our readers were entreated not to prejudge the case, but rather to withhold their decision, till the whole subject be fairly laid before them. In prosecution of our plan therefore,

I. We shall produce some proofs from the sacred records, that by the divine appointment there is no other way, in which sinful men can find acceptance with God than through faith in

Jesus Christ, to the entire exclusion of all dependence upon themselves. It was the original institution even from the fall, and it must remain as an immoveable foundation to the end of time. The same medium of intercourse between heaven and earth prevailed in the old testament, though darkly exhibited, which is now so explicitly revealed in the new. All the ancient saints were admitted into a state of favour with God, no otherwise than through a reliance upon the promised Saviour. Thus we are instructed,—“BY FAITH Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous:—and Noah also became heir of the righteousness which is BY FAITH *.” Of the great father of the faithful, Abraham, it is recorded, that “HE BELIEVED GOD, and it was counted unto him for righteousness:” and from his case it is argued at large, that all, who would be “blessed with faithful Abraham,” must “walk in the steps of his faith.” For “it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him, but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe †.” This method of reconciliation is briefly but distinctly stated by the prophet Habakkuk,—“The just shall live BY HIS FAITH ‡:” and St. Paul maintains, from this

* Heb. xi. 4, 7.

† Gen. xv. 6. Rom. iv. Gal. iii.

‡ Hab. ii. 4.

expression, that no other principle will operate “to the saving of the soul*.” Another apostle declares, that the doctrine runs through all the ancient scriptures, that all point to the Redeemer, and that “to Him give all the prophets witness, that through his name WHOSOEVER BELIEVETH IN HIM shall receive remission of sins†.”

When our Lord appeared, he spake to the same purpose, though in plainer language; and “as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name‡.” In opening to Nicodemus the nature of his commission, and of the salvation to be effected by him, He strenuously insisted on the necessity and efficacy of faith, as the sole mean of avoiding the final perdition of the soul, asserting again and again, “that WHOSOEVER BELIEVETH IN HIM should not perish, but have everlasting life§.” Throughout all his ministry he maintained—“This is the work of God, that ye believe on him, whom he hath sent||.” And upon his departing from the world when he left his representatives behind him, he gave them the solemn charge to preach the same doctrine, and to declare that FAITH is the grand decisive principle, on which men’s eternal states

* Rom. i. 17. Gal. iii. 11. Heb. x. 38, 39.

† Acts x. 43.

‡ John i. 12.

§ John iii. 15—18.

|| John vi. 29.

depend:—"He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned *."

With what fidelity and zeal this charge was executed, let the acts of the apostles and their epistles testify. To every enquiring penitent they replied, "BELIEVE ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, and thou shalt be saved:" and the unvaried tenor of all their public declarations was,—“Through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by Him ALL THAT BELIEVE ARE JUSTIFIED FROM ALL THINGS†.” Advert to their writings, and you will find the doctrine in question every where established, vindicated, guarded, and earnestly commended to your devout acceptance. Thus they speak,—“The righteousness of God without the law is manifested,—even the righteousness of God, which is BY FAITH OF JESUS CHRIST unto all, and upon all them that believe; for there is no difference:—that He might be just, and THE JUSTIFIER OF HIM WHICH BELIEVETH IN JESUS. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude, that A MAN IS JUSTIFIED BY FAITH WITHOUT THE DEEDS OF THE LAW.—And being JUSTIFIED BY FAITH WE

* Mark xvi. 16.

† Acts xiii. 38, 39. xvi. 31.

have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ *.”

This doctrine was acceptable to the Heathen, but the Jews stumbled at and rejected it. “The Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith: but Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it, not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For Christ is the end of the law for RIGHTEOUSNESS TO EVERY ONE THAT BELIEVETH.—For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed †.”

The epistle to the Galatians seems to be written for the very purpose of maintaining this important article against those, who denied or perverted it. With great ardour St. Paul stood forth in its defence, declaring, “The life which I now live in the flesh, I live BY THE FAITH OF THE SON OF GOD, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.—But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise BY FAITH OF JESUS CHRIST might be given to them that

* Rom. iii. 21, 22, 26, 27, 28. v. 1.

† Rom. ix. 30—32. x. 4, 11.

believe. For ye are all the children of God BY FAITH IN CHRIST JESUS *.” Nor was he less earnest to establish the same truth among other churches, instructing them that “by grace they were saved THROUGH FAITH;—not of works, lest any man should boast;”—and expressing his own most fervent desire, that he might “be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, THE RIGHTEOUSNESS WHICH IS OF GOD BY FAITH †.”

The other apostles wrote less, but they were all in perfect harmony. St. James, who has been thought most unfavourable to the doctrine, directs us to “ASK IN FAITH,” if we would “receive any thing of the Lord;”—and enquires, “Hath not God chosen the poor of this world, RICH IN FAITH, and heirs of the kingdom ‡?” St. Peter maintaining that our “spiritual sacrifices are acceptable to God by Jesus Christ,” adds, “It is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious; and HE THAT BELIEVETH ON HIM shall not be confounded: unto you therefore which believe He is precious §.—St. John also, describing the importance and efficacy of faith, says, “WHO-SOEVER BELIEVETH that Jesus is the Christ, is

* Gal. ii. 20, 21. iii. 22, 26.

† Eph. ii. 8, 9. Phil. iii. 9.

‡ James i. 6, 7. ii. 5.

§ 1 Peter ii. 6, 7.

born of God:—and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith:—HE THAT BELIEVETH ON THE SON OF GOD hath the witness in himself*.” And he solemnly declares his gospel was written, “that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that BELIEVING WE MIGHT HAVE LIFE THROUGH HIS NAME†.”—St. Jude therefore exhorts us to “build up ourselves on our most holy faith,—and to LOOK FOR THE MERCY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST UNTO ETERNAL LIFE‡.”

The most celebrated preachers and writers in the first ages of the christian church were agreed upon this point, and defended it with much diligence and zeal. But after some time sad corruptions sprang up, and through their baleful influence the glorious truth was denied or grievously obscured. Various inventions and superstitions were received, rigorous observances and burdensome formalities were imposed upon the conscience, and drew off men’s attention from Christ; so that “believing on Him” was held in little estimation, or rather it was considered as a dangerous principle. This was undeniably the case through the long and dismal night of Popery. But at length the Reformation broke out, “as a light in a dark place,” and shone in this land with a glorious splendor. The doctrine then

* 1 John v. 1, 4, 10.

† John xx. 31.

‡ Jude 20, 21.

most strenuously contended for was JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE. It was the most prominent part of the system maintained by all the first Protestants, and in their view, as Luther one of their boldest champions has expressed it, "*Articulus stantis vel cadentis ecclesiæ*;" the article with which the church must either stand or fall. Let their writings be appealed to without partiality or prejudice, and they will give their united and explicit testimony in support of the opinion here pleaded for.

That it was established in our church, we consider as most unquestionable; and those, who controvert the idea, betray the grossest ignorance or the strangest inconsistency. It runs throughout all our prayers, and constitutes the very essence of the Liturgy. An express article was framed in its defence, and it is there commended to our affectionate regard as "a most wholesome doctrine and very full of comfort." The Homilies will prove that we are not mistaken in our interpretation. They elucidate, enlarge upon, and vindicate the point, with a beautiful simplicity, but with uncommon clearness and strength of expression. They declare, "That we be justified by faith only, freely and without works,—is what the holy scripture teacheth us: this is the strong rock and foundation of christian religion; this doctrine all old and ancient authors of Christ's church do approve; this doctrine ad-

vanceth and setteth forth the true glory of Christ, and beateth down the vain glory of man; this whosoever denieth is not to be accounted for a christian man, nor for a setter forth of Christ's glory, but for an adversary to Christ and his gospel, and for a setter forth of men's vain glory *."

With such an ecclesiastical constitution it may seem strange, that any among ourselves should oppose or doubt of this article of our creed. Yet it has been so much kept out of sight, that at length very many of those, who say they are of the church, either know not its meaning, or deride the very mention of it, as an heterodox or schismatical opinion. But we trust, that God is at this time mercifully dispersing the darkness, and restoring to our church the light of his truth. May it shine more and more unto the perfect day! Let us examine, Are we consistent with our professed principles? Is the doctrine in question that, which we have received, and of which we have experienced the salutary influence? Most abundant cause we have to rejoice, that such a way of access to God is opened for us through faith alone in Christ Jesus. Therefore

II. We shall suggest some reasons for this appointment. Here we must advance with peculiar caution. The Lord alone has a right to prescribe

* Homily on Salvation, 2d Part.

the terms of our acceptance; and whatever may be his plan, we should desire to comply with it, without asking any captious questions about his reasons. Yet, consistently with the deepest reverence and humility, we may study what he has revealed, and adore the wisdom as well as goodness of his conduct. Now we remark, that as there are only two supposable ways of justification, the one by faith in Jesus Christ, the other by human merit, and as both cannot be maintained, the doctrine here pleaded for comes recommended to us, rather than the other, by the following considerations.

1. It is suitable to the fallen state of man. It is exactly adapted to the circumstances of our case. It represents us to be, just what we are, guilty, depraved, condemned, and helpless, and provides an adequate remedy for us in our wretched and perilous condition. It is therefore calculated to inspire hope, by removing all obstructions in the way of our return to God. Will not this incline us to receive it most cordially? To such at least, as are conscious of their sin and misery, it will be truly welcome. And these persons will be prepared to reject every other plan. For they will say, "It is vain to talk to us of innocence, or of a good life, or of any meritorious duties: we possess them not, and we presume they are no where to be found. Nay, what you propose as our last subterfuge, our

sincere obedience, is so mixed and polluted, that it would overwhelm us with confusion in the presence of a holy God. We cannot therefore admit any system, however specious and admired, which is built upon the false hypothesis, that men are not such corrupt and degenerate creatures, as we find ourselves to be."

2. It is humbling to the sinner. We might expect, that, if God should be pleased to save us, he would do it in such a way, as to convince us of our baseness, and strip us of all our pride. He has accordingly declared it to be his purpose, "That the lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted:"—and "that no flesh shall glory in his presence*." Now by the doctrine before us this great design is answered. Our glory is laid in the dust: we are not allowed to plead or make mention of any duties or attainments: but such a view is given us of ourselves, as silences and confounds us. Thus we are brought to our proper place; and it is every way expedient that we should lie abased before God. But on any other supposition, if man in any degree by his own exertions contribute to the procuring of his justification, he may boast, he may take some merit and praise to himself, contrary to the christian system, and

* Isaiah ii. 11. 1 Cor. i. 29.

to God's solemn determination *. O let us beware lest we presume to be wiser than the Almighty, and lest, by exalting ourselves, we be finally and for ever cast down!

3. It abundantly displays the grace of God. He will have his own mercy to be perceived and magnified; and it is meet and right that we should contemplate the subject with admiration and devout thanksgiving. But where are our obligations to grace, if we are saved by "our own works or deservings?" There are those indeed, who ascribe it to God's unmerited goodness, that they should be accepted for their own obedience, that they should be enabled to do any thing good, or be rewarded for it. But this is a strange confusion: for it would be JUSTICE, not MERCY, to pronounce us righteous, if we be so in and of ourselves. "To him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt †." But now we are assured, "It is of faith, that it might be BY GRACE ‡." It pleased the Lord to fix upon this method, "that in the ages to come He might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus §." And in a very glorious light indeed it exhibits this grace. The redeemed sinner is viewed, not as culpable in a small degree, but as destitute of

* Rom. iii. 27. Eph. ii 9.

† Rom. iv. 4.

‡ Rom. iv. 16.

§ Eph. ii. 7.

every plea and recommendation in himself, as altogether vile and abominable, and yet salvation is bestowed upon him “freely,” “without money and without price.” O let us adore and celebrate the abundant mercy, which hath made so rich a provision for us!

4. It exalts the honour of our Redeemer. All our hopes arise from his interposition; and the Father’s purpose is, that “He shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high *.” Very glorious he will appear to all, who know his name. He is the foundation of all their confidence, their life, their peace, their joy. The grace of Christ is to them the most delightful subject. They admire, and trust, and love, and praise him. Others cannot understand their language; or they consider it as overstrained and too degrading. Indeed it is only to be vindicated on the ground of the doctrine here maintained. Deny this doctrine, and you will be consistent in your fears of giving too much honour to the Saviour. By your schemes of self-dependence you exclude him from his office, and set up your own righteousness instead of his. You thrust him from his throne; or else you propose to share the glory with him: You presume, that you shall make yourselves worthy of his favour, and that his benefits will be bestowed for your endeavours,

* Isaiah lii. 13.

Your sincere obedience, not his merit, is the basis of your hope. Are you aware of the tendency of your system, as robbing him of his mediatorial dignity? How entirely inconsistent is it with that unreserved reliance and affection, which the gospel requires us to fix upon him, and with those devout ascriptions of praise, which will be eternally offered by all his church; "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever! Amen*."

5. It is favourable to holiness. This observation may excite surprise; as the doctrine is supposed by many to produce the contrary effect. Now, it must be allowed, that no plan unfriendly to real holiness can proceed from God. Of the two opposite systems, then, on which side does the advantage lie? Those, who plead for man's obedience as in any measure meritorious, always entertain lax notions of the divine law, as if it would make allowances for our imperfections, or might be repaired by our amendment, or as if it would admit of some compensation from the transgressor. Accordingly, though they contend so strenuously for good works, they are generally careless, and afraid of carrying matters too far. Lamentable experience proves, that their motives to duty are not efficacious. But the knowledge

* Rev. i. 5, 6.

of Christ, and a sense of his love in undertaking and perfecting our salvation, will produce an influence superior to that of any other principle. What a view of the odiousness of sin does this plan of mercy exhibit! In how forcible a light does it represent our obligations to be holy! What gratitude, love, and zeal, is it calculated to excite in the believer's breast! Let us hear the sentiments of One, who felt its power: "I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." And now, "whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's."—"Ye are not your own: for ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's *."

Such is the nature, such the influence, of Christianity! Such are the excellent effects of faith, as we shall afterwards shew. A minute attention to the state of religion in the world will convince every serious enquirer of the truth of these remarks. Where is there among living characters any thing like "the power of godliness" to be found, but with those who honour the Saviour as their "all in all;" who "rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh †?" Who

* Gal. ii. 19, 20. Rom. xiv. 8. 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

† Phil. iii. 3.

then shall oppose? Or shall any treat the subject with indifference? Yet, since many despise or make light of it, as if it were all a vain dispute,

III. We shall briefly consider the importance of the doctrine.—The scriptures represent it as most interesting. How much is it insisted on by the apostles, who were best qualified to appreciate its worth! How zealously do they defend it! It was on this very point that St. Paul so firmly resisted those false brethren, who were undermining it; “To whom,” said he, “we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour;” and he intimates, that otherwise “THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL” would have been abandoned *. And is it a matter of less consequence in the present day? Has our religion so suffered by the lapse of time, that what was originally essential to its very existence, is now to be given up? Or are we to compliment all persons, whatever principles they may receive or reject? This, it should seem, is the modern plan; but it is altogether a system of infidelity.

The doctrine we contend for lies at the foundation of Christianity. For the question here to be decided is, How we may stand with confidence before God? and the main intention of the gospel is to afford us satisfactory information upon this point. But the substance of the plan, which it lays down, is entirely set aside by the contrary doctrine. Let not that therefore be treated as a

* Gal. ii. 4, 5.

trifling error, which as St. Paul declares is “another Gospel,” and against which he denounces the anathema of heaven *. Let us be thoroughly aware of the danger. Let us seek the truth with ardour, and maintain it with firmness.

The principle of self-righteousness is fatal. It implies the prevalence of malignant dispositions, which are most offensive to God; such are pride, unbelief, and contempt of Christ. Many have actually perished by it. “They attained not to the law of righteousness; because they sought it, not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law.”—“Unto them, which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the Head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient †.” Their case holds out a solemn warning to us. Let us examine the ground of our hopes. We must not trust to the regularity of our conduct, to good tempers, or to any amiable dispositions. If Jesus Christ be not our sole dependence, nothing can be right in our system; and we deceive ourselves in crying Peace, peace; for there is no peace to us in such a state. “He that believeth not, shall be damned ‡.” O may we yet hear the voice of our God and Saviour, and submit to him with our whole hearts, that we may live for ever!

* Gal. i. 6—9.

† Rom. ix. 31, 32. 1 Peter i. 7, 8.

‡ Mark xvi. 16.

ESSAY XLV.

ON JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH.

PART III.

Truth opposed on various grounds.—The objections against Justification by faith considered.—Proved, that it does not make void, but establish, the law;—that it does not contradict other principles in the scriptures, especially the doctrine of St. James;—that it is not inconsistent with the account given us of the day of Judgment;—and that it is not derogatory to human nature in its fallen state.

THE truth of God meets with various obstructions, chiefly through the ignorance and perverseness of men. They misconceive, and they misrepresent it. Though it be fairly and explicitly stated, yet many, having no ideas or very confused ones upon the subject, may consider it as an absurd and inconsistent plan. They may also be inclined to oppose and reject it through their own corrupt affections: and to justify their dislike they may contend against it with ingenuity and

plausibility of argument. It is not enough therefore, that we adduce in its support direct and incontestable proofs before those, who are unwilling to believe: we are pressed with objections of different kinds, and required to remove one difficulty after another. This however is nothing new: so it has been in every age of the church; and if the same opposition be raised among ourselves, we should not be surprised or discouraged: it may eventually promote "the furtherance of the gospel."

Among all the doctrines of grace, none have been assailed with more violence, than that which we are now maintaining. It shall be the business of the present essay to reply to some of the most common charges, which our adversaries urge. It is objected to the doctrine of justification by faith,

I. That it "makes void the law." Such was the very language held by those, who cavilled with the preaching of St. Paul; and by his vigorous reply he has taught us so to repel the attack of our enemies, as to turn it against themselves. Wherever the same principle is maintained, it is invariably resisted as having an unfriendly aspect upon obedience and a tendency to licentiousness: and this consideration affords some presumption, that the principle so opposed is the very same which the apostle every where inculcated: for no such inference would ever be

drawn from the contrary system of human merit. Consider it more minutely.

It is said to be a necessary consequence of preaching that men are justified by faith alone, that we derogate from the honour and authority of the divine law, and vacate all obligations to observe its precepts. But is it so in truth? This would be a formidable difficulty, if such could be proved to be the unavoidable result. We abhor the conclusion, and we are confident that the premises laid down must lead to the very reverse. We say, then, with the strenuous advocate for the free grace of Christ, “Do we make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law *.” Let the whole system be fairly examined in all its bearings, and we doubt not but its beneficial effects in producing a sublime and extended morality will be confessed.

It represents man as a transgressor, in a state of guilt and condemnation, most justly liable to the punishment of everlasting death. It requires every applicant for mercy to acknowledge the equity of his sentence, to feel the deepest contrition for his offences, and even for the wrong propensities of his nature, and to be thoroughly convinced of his own inability to yield the obedience which he ought, or to repair the mischief of the fall. What is this, but to put an honour

* Rom. iii. 31.

on the commandment, to maintain its obligations, and to vindicate the righteousness of its decisions?

It proposes a method of recovery, but such as is favourable to holiness. No man can view the Saviour by faith, and make light of sin. For what do we behold in his life and in his death, but a demonstration of the divine purity, and of the odiousness of transgression? The reasonableness and excellence of the precept are evinced by his entire subjection to it; and its most tremendous sanctions are justified by his voluntary endurance of the curse. The believer therefore, fixing his regard and dependence on the righteousness and sacrifice of his Redeemer, perceives the law of God to be more abundantly magnified, than by any other plan, and he is constrained to admire and revere it.

Can it for a moment be imagined, that the faith, which is "of the operation of God," (and no other can justify) will ever lead to a contemptuous neglect of Him or of his precepts? The influence of the Holy Spirit, which alone can produce this principle, cannot possibly vitiate the heart, or be of any licentious tendency. Believers are accordingly described as "new creatures;"—the Lord has "put his laws into their mind, and written them in their hearts*."

* 2 Cor. v. 17. Heb. viii. 10.

This renovating change is the source of all real holiness, and “the faith of God’s elect” is inseparably connected with it, or rather is a part of its excellent fruits. Shall it not then be allowed to promote, in the most effectual manner, a devout and uniform regard to the divine will?

Still it is supposed, that we encourage a continuance in sin by representing the salvation of Christ to be so free, extended to such vile offenders, and at so cheap a rate. It was the very objection urged against St. Paul, when he maintained, that “where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:” and we learn from him, that the doctrine is not justly liable to such an imputation. We say then, as he did, “God forbid! How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein*?” It is the glory of the gospel, that its provisions are so free and abundant, being offered to all “without money and without price:” and shall we darken its splendour, or detract from its excellence, through our foolish ungrounded fears for the consequences? This would be a presumptuous attempt to be wiser than God. Let us leave to him the vindication of his own truth, while we “stand fast in the liberty, wherewith Christ hath made us free†.”

The doctrine in question affords consolation,

* Rom. v. 20. vi. 1, 2.

† Gal. v. 1.

not to those who would hold fast their iniquities, but to such only as are willing and desirous to “be made free from sin, and become the servants of God.” Such we encourage to come to Christ, as for other purposes, so especially that they may obtain the wished-for deliverance from “the law of sin.” Is this of any dangerous tendency? Or would it be a better plan to exclude all but the good and the virtuous from the invitations of the gospel? To whom, then, might its proposals be addressed?

Or shall it be thought, that believers renouncing all ideas of their own merit, and being “justified freely by grace,” can have no strong and effectual motives for diligence in duty? They entertain not the mercenary notion of deserving heaven; but considerations of greater force will animate them to persevere in a holy obedience, with which they know that their final salvation is indissolubly connected. It is in their view the surest evidence of their interest in Christ,—the very end for which they are redeemed,—the brightest ornament of their profession,—the appointed way to heaven, and a preparation for its enjoyment,—it will be the object of notice and approbation in the day of judgment, and determine the degree of their happiness for ever. Are not these arguments of sufficient weight to promote an attention to every good work, or in other words to “establish the law?”

It is objected

II. That it contradicts many passages in the sacred scriptures.

1. It is thought to be incompatible with those promises of pardon, life, and salvation, which are made to certain pious dispositions and exertions to repentance and obedience. Thus it is said, “If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:—There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth:—To them, who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, He will render eternal life:—When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive*.” But these and similar declarations imply only, that the blessings promised are necessarily connected with the duties mentioned, that is, cannot be had without them, and that the redeemed of the Lord “walk in them.” The heavenly felicity is given to none but the holy; and yet it is not given on account of their holiness. They are received to favour and obtain a reward, only in consequence of their justification and from a regard to Jesus Christ, to whom they are united by faith. “He hath made us accepted in the Beloved:—To whom coming,

* Matt. vi. 14. Luke xv. 10. Rom. ii. 7. Ezek. xviii. 27.

as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious, ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.—The God of peace, therefore, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen *.”

According to this representation we believe, that till we possess faith in Christ we remain in a state of condemnation, and perform no acceptable service; but that in Him our guilt is done away, and that our duties presented in his name, though in themselves defective and defiled, are accounted as “a sweet-smelling savour” for his sake. They are then spoken of in terms of high commendation: but it is our relation to Christ, which stamps a value and a dignity upon them, and the glorious recompence awarded to them is to be considered as a deserved testimony of the love of the Father to the Son; to whom therefore the whole glory is ultimately to be ascribed. And such we conceive to be the theological system of the church of England. For she teaches, “Albeit that good works, which are the fruits of faith, and follow after justification, cannot put away our sins, and endure the severity of God’s

* Eph. i. 6. 1 Peter ii. 4, 5. Heb. xiii. 21.

judgment; yet are they pleasing to God in Christ, and do spring out necessarily of a true and lively faith; insomuch that by them a lively faith may be as evidently known, as a tree discerned by the fruit.—But works done before the grace of Christ and the inspiration of his Spirit are not pleasant to God; yea rather, for that they are not done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done, we doubt not but they have the nature of sin*.”

2. The principal passage urged against us is the declaration of St. James, “that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only †:” and it is sometimes insinuated, that he wrote on purpose to correct the error of St. Paul’s doctrine, of which he saw the mischievous effects in the church. This is a dangerous and profane suggestion. We maintain, that the two apostles cannot be at variance; that both were inspired of God, and infallible in their decisions. And upon a fair and attentive view of what they have advanced, it will appear that there is no opposition, no inconsistency between them. Their designs and their subjects were manifestly different; but the one does not contradict the other. St. Paul treats of our acceptance with God, and addressing those, who “trusted in themselves that they were righteous,” proves that our justification in the

* Articles xii. and xiii.

† James ii. 24.

court of heaven can never be procured by any works of our own, and that we must receive the blessing by faith only. This point was established in the church, but some abused it. There were those, who imbibed erroneous notions of faith, as if it were nothing more than a speculative assent to christian doctrine, which might be compatible with unsanctified tempers and unholy conduct. It was of importance therefore, that the ministers of Christ should vigorously resist this evil; and St. James undertook the task. In prosecution of his design he reproves the hypocritical pretender, and requires him to evidence his faith by his works, or else to drop his vain confidence. He warns him not to deceive himself by that, which might have the appearance of life, but which in reality was dead, because unoperative and unfruitful, and declares that no saving benefit could attach to it.

From this plain and obvious interpretation it appears, that, while the two apostles treat of different parts of the christian system, they ought not to be set in opposition: they perfectly harmonize together. The "faith without works," which St. James reprobates, is not that which St. Paul commends; and that, which the latter maintains to be alone available to a sinner's acceptance with God, irrespective of any works, will not remain that barren principle, which the former so sharply reproves, and shews to be entirely useless and disgraceful.

The main point of observation is, that they speak of two separate and distinct kinds of justification: not, what some intimate, as if we were at first only to be received to the divine favour through the righteousness of the Redeemer, and at last to be admitted into heaven for our own merit; since our whole salvation must be ascribed to Jesus Christ, in its completion, as well as in its origin: but we apprehend, that, while St. Paul settles the important business of the justification of our PERSONS before God, St. James establishes the mode by which alone our FAITH can be justified, or proved to be genuine, sincere, and efficacious. Now, without all controversy, a man's profession of believing is to be justified by his works, or the subsequent conduct of his life. Thus he is vindicated from the charge or suspicion of hypocrisy, in his own conscience, in the sight of the world, and at the bar of God. This is agreeable to the common use of the term "justified," and is the only sense, which will suit the argumentation of St. James. For he maintains the necessity of "SHEWING our faith by works," that is, of JUSTIFYING it before men by some external proofs; exactly as we must evince our charity, not by saying, "Be thou warmed, and be thou filled," but by substantial acts of beneficence. Such are the instances adduced by him: "Abraham was justified by works," not thereby accounted righteous before

God, for this he had been many years before, but then he gave a full and striking evidence of his faith, “when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar.” The case was perfectly similar with Rahab, “when she received the messengers of Israel.” On the same ground the apostle argues, that the life and vigour of the body are proved by its activity, and that “as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also*.” These are salutary cautions, which do not contradict the doctrine before us, but which are peculiarly requisite, where it is generally professed, and where many may be suspected of abusing it.

It is objected

III. That it is inconsistent with the account given us of the proceedings of the last day; inasmuch as works only will then be enquired after, and brought forth to view. Thus we are informed by our Lord, that an examination will be instituted, as to the relief administered to the afflicted members of his church, the hungry, the thirsty, the strangers, the naked, the sick, and the prisoners †;” and by St. Paul, that “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad ‡.”

* James ii. 14—26.

† Matt. xxv. 31—46.

‡ 2 Cor. v. 10.

This, however, will form no difficulty, if we consider what is the grand design of the universal judgment. The intent is, not then to pardon sinners, who were unpardoned before, but to separate “the precious from the vile,” and to manifest the equity of God’s decisions in the rewards and punishments which He will administer. The character of the redeemed must be ascertained by their fruits of righteousness, which for that purpose will be produced and published before the whole world. The Lord himself will declare his approbation of their services, and prove to the conviction of all, that “He had afore prepared them unto glory*.” He will plead their cause, vindicate their integrity, and display the efficacy of his grace in them, by exhibiting their works of love, as signs or evidences of their faith and of their union with himself. The cup of cold water bestowed “IN HIS NAME” will obtain an honourable mention and requital. The Lord Christ will distinguish his active servant according to the improvement of his talents, and will say to him, “Well done!—FOR MY NAME’S SAKE thou hast laboured and hast not fainted:—thou hast done it UNTO ME:—enter thou into the joy of thy Lord †!” This account favours not the doctrine of human merit: nothing can more strongly represent the necessity and advantages of faith.

* Rom. ix. 23.

† Mark ix. 41. Matt. xxv. 21, 40. Rev. ii. 2, 3.

In like manner, while the Judge pronounces the tremendous doom of unbelievers, He will prove that they are wicked. He will expose to view their aggravated iniquities, their neglect of all duties, and especially their contempt and rejection of Him, in order to shew that they have no part in his salvation. No fruits of faith are to be found upon them: “You have not done it unto me;—therefore Depart from me, ye cursed *!”

But the states of all men are in fact determined before they die. It remains only for “the day to declare them,” and by public trial to decide, who among us “have received Christ Jesus the Lord,” and are justified by faith. None will finally be saved but the holy: their holiness will form a suitableness or a meetness for heaven, and manifest God’s righteous character; yet it will not entitle them to happiness, though, on the ground of the divine promise and covenant, they are said “to have a right to the tree of life †.” If these things be so, let us “be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know that our labour is not in vain in the Lord:”—Let us “give diligence to make our calling and election sure;—for so an entrance shall be ministered unto us abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ ‡!”

* Matt. xxv. 41.

† Rev. xxii. 14.

‡ 1 Cor. xv. 58. 2 Peter i. 10, 11.

Yet after all that has been advanced, many may be unwilling to submit to this doctrine. It is mortifying to their pride; and through their dislike they will multiply their objections. They urge therefore,

IV. That it is derogatory to the honour of human nature. To this we may briefly reply, by allowing that it is so, according to the ideas which some men entertain of human nature. They seem to conceive of it, as if it had suffered nothing by the fall; and therefore they talk of its dignity, and even of its innocence. To such persons, we are aware, the whole of this subject must be offensive. They cannot bear, that man should be represented as so guilty, so vile, and helpless; that in this respect all should be laid upon a level; that all must be indebted for their acceptance to the righteousness of another; that their own fancied goodness and boasted attainments must be renounced, and Jesus Christ become every thing in their estimation. Yet this is what the principles, here maintained, require; and, though they seem harsh and rigorous, we dare not soften them, to render them palatable to those, who “think of themselves more highly than they ought to think.”

The question is, what is the true state of human nature, not what we might wish it to be. If man be not utterly devoid both of righteousness and strength, then indeed we have brought

against him “a railing accusation,” and he may complain of the foul indignity. But our system makes him not worse than he really is. It finds him in a degraded, sunk, and perishing condition. It provides for his various necessities: it bids him, Arise and live: it proposes to him the restoration of what he had lost, or rather an exaltation and excellence, which he had not originally possessed. Is this a grievance? Ought he not with admiring gratitude and eager delight to accept the proffered boon, which comes recommended to him by this consideration, that it is perfectly adapted to his case? But the terms are too humiliating:—yet no other will suit him. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,”—is a message which should excite his warmest love and loudest thanksgivings to God; because in every other way he is excluded from hope. Shall he murmur, that salvation is bestowed upon him “freely?” As well may the poor creature, who is destitute of all supplies, and perishing with hunger, find fault with the benevolent hand, which tenders him bread for the relief of his necessity “without money and without price;” when he himself can neither purchase nor earn it. Let him seize it without delay, and praise his benefactor.

Christians, you will rejoice in that very consideration, to which some object. The doctrine is the more grateful to you, because it lays you in

the dust, which you know to be your proper place, and gives all glory to Christ, whom you account “worthy to receive it.” But while you maintain the truth, endeavour “by well doing to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men,” who reproach your principles as being of a licentious tendency. It rests with you to vindicate their honour and their purity. Let your lives as well as tongues proclaim, that you acknowledge no sentiments in religion, which are not “according to godliness.”

Many remain unholy, and are content to do so. Such persons should be warned: you are not competent judges of this doctrine; you cannot speak against its efficacy, as you have not made trial of it. It is not indeed adapted to you; and you do in fact reject it. You ought therefore to be aware, that the grace of the gospel, as well as the strictness of the law, condemns you; or rather, that your contempt or abuse of it constitutes your most heinous guilt. You deceive yourselves most awfully, if you suppose, that you “have believed in God,” while you are not “careful to maintain good works.” There cannot be a more fatal delusion. Your inconsistent conduct indeed does not disprove the doctrine you profess, but it lays a stumbling-block in the way of the weak. You “give great occasion to the enemies of the

Lord to blaspheme:" and what else can be looked for, but that you perish with aggravated ruin? O may you yet repent, and obtain the blessing of the Saviour, in being "turned away every one of you from his iniquities*!"

* Acts iii. 26.

ESSAY XLVI.

ON FAITH WORKING BY LOVE.

The importance of faith in Christ.—Its efficacy in promoting holiness, “working by love;”—producing love to God—to Christ—to man—especially to the “brethren,”—to their souls and to their bodies.—How faith possesses such practical influence.

MEN have been ever prone to overlook or lightly esteem what is most important and essential in religion, and to fix their chief attention on circumstantialia or matters comparatively trifling. The nature of the salvation revealed in the gospel, and the only method of coming to its enjoyment, have been disregarded and treated with contempt, while curious debates have been instituted about mere ceremonies, and unprofitable distinctions most zealously contended for. Instead of “coveting earnestly the best gifts,” and “considering one another to provoke unto love and to good works,” Christians have spent their ardour in promoting hurtful divisions, reproaching and anathematizing each other.

How different is this from the true spirit and genius of our religion! Yet thus it has always been, even from the earliest ages. The apostles saw and lamented it in the primitive church; and the warnings and reproofs, which they gave upon that occasion, will furnish the most salutary admonitions to us. Let us hear the declaration of St. Paul, “In Jesus Christ, neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but FAITH, WHICH WORKETH BY LOVE*.” It is as if he had said, “Upon the christian plan no one should be elated in himself, however exact and scrupulous in external observances, nor should any man be discouraged, though he has no such qualifications to plead. Circumcision is indeed a divine institution, but it will not procure our justification before God: nor will uncircumcision exclude us from the blessing. Jews and Gentiles equally need a Saviour; the same mode of application to him is equally requisite for all; and nothing will be of any avail, but such a dependence upon him, as will soften and purify the heart, and produce in it the excellent fruit of holy and benevolent affections.”

Here, then, the question is, not, What has been our education, what our religious system, or form of worship? but, Have we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ? and is the sincerity of our

* Gal. v. 6.

regard to him evinced by its effects? This principle will secure the salvation of its possessor, whatever he may have once been, and nothing can supply its place. This is the grace, by which we participate of Christ and all his benefits. In the very first instance, as we have seen, immediately upon our believing, we are admitted to a state of favour, completely justified, taken into God's family, and made heirs of his kingdom. But the progress also and completion of the spiritual life depend upon the continued exercise of the same principle. This surely will prove its excellency, and rescue the doctrine laid down from the reproaches cast upon it. We perform no acceptable duty but by faith: we surmount every difficulty, and rise superior to the assaults of all our enemies by faith. Our hopes and enjoyments, our vigour and perseverance in the christian life, depend upon our faith. The sanctification of the soul, in its various branches, is carried on chiefly by the same means. One part of it will come under our present consideration, while we enlarge on the apostle's description, "FAITH WORKETH BY LOVE." It is not an idle, but operative principle; it "worketh;" its energy is felt in the heart, and its labours are most abundant and beneficial. It is "a tree of righteousness," "the planting of the Lord," and its fruit is sweet and precious.

I. It produceth love to God: and of that holy

affection we are naturally destitute. We dislike his character, we resist his authority, we care not for his favour, we are averse to his service. But through faith in Jesus Christ we are reconciled to him *, our enmity is subdued, and He secures our warmest affections to himself. What a change is then accomplished! We seek, admire, love, and long after Him, from whom we had “deeply revolted.” Such views and dispositions respecting the ever blessed Jehovah belong exclusively to believers, and are produced in them by that display of his perfections, which is exhibited in the cross of Christ; for there they behold Him as Holy, Just, and True, but especially as Merciful and Gracious,—a God of Peace and Love. Thus they describe their sentiments and the feelings of their hearts: “Love is of God; and every one that loveth, is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.—And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and

* Rom. v. 10.

God in him.—We love Him, because he first loved us *.”

This is the most efficacious principle of obedience : and this being established in the heart, the interests of practical religion must be secured. “ For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments : and his commandments are not grievous †.” What one precept will be disregarded or considered as a hardship, while the Lawgiver is revered and beloved ? What difficulties will be declined or complained of in his service ? His day, and house, and worship, will be delighted in, and every exertion, however arduous or painful, which will afford an opportunity of testifying a cordial attachment to him and a zeal for his cause and glory, will be accounted a high privilege. But how rare is such obedience as this ! “ Iniquity abounds, and the love of many waxes cold ‡.” The commandments of the Lord are thought unreasonably strict and severe ; and his ordinances treated with contempt. Fervour in religion, and laborious efforts for its advancement, excite reproach and derision. A sure proof, that however the gospel may be professed, it is not generally believed. The faith of Jesus Christ would do more than restrain presumptuous transgressions ; it would render men truly and ardently devout.

* 1 John iv. 7—10, 16, 19.

† 1 John v. 3.

‡ Matt. xxiv. 12.

II. It produceth love to the Saviour, in his mediatorial character, as “Immanuel,—God with us.” His real excellency is known only to believers. Their admiration and esteem are excited by the view of his dignity and condescension, his work and offices, his sufferings and exaltation. They feel a cordial approbation of “the redemption that is in Him,” they maintain an unreserved dependence upon him, and make an absolute surrender of themselves to him. They also “receive out of his fulness grace for grace;” and thus obtain hope, and peace, and joy. They are renewed, strengthened, preserved, and animated, by him. By fresh applications to him they procure such supplies, as are adapted to their cases and necessities. Their object is day by day to keep their eye fixed upon him; and while they look, the view inflames their heart with holy desires, gratitude, affection, and zeal.

Such are believers, according to the descriptions given in the divine oracles: and this representation only will account for their conduct. They are ready to renounce worldly prospects and enjoyments in obedience to his command, to make painful sacrifices, and to endure every extremity for his sake. They love not father or mother, wife or children, brethren or sisters, houses or lands, in comparison of Him. They “go forth therefore unto him without the camp bearing his reproach;”—they “deny themselves,

and take up their cross, and follow him" even unto death*. They can say, "What things were gain to us, those we counted loss for Christ: yea doubtless, and we count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord; for whom we have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that we may win Christ, and be found in Him†." They feel, more than they can express, their immense obligations to him, and are thereby excited to those strenuous exertions, which others may condemn as most extravagant, if not the result of mental derangement. They reply for themselves, "The love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if One died for all, then were all dead; and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again‡." They are not therefore satisfied with devout contemplations of him in solitude; their object is to serve him with activity and vigour in all their domestic and social connections, as far as their talents and opportunities extend. Having "tasted that he is gracious," they most ardently desire to bring others to the knowledge of his salvation: and, while they are assiduously promoting his cause in the world,

* Matt. x. 37. Mark viii. 34, 35. x. 29. Luke xiv. 26.

Heb. xiii. 13. † Phil. iii. 7—9. ‡ 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

they feel their hearts expanded with universal benevolence; but they are most cordially attached to all those, who love his name and bear his image.

Will not this, then, secure the interests of morality? Is it probable, or is it possible, that the principle, which produces such a regard to the Lord Jesus Christ, can be unfriendly to holiness? Rather, does it not furnish the most powerful incentives to it?

“Talk they of morals? O thou bleeding Lamb!
The grand morality is love of Thee.”—YOUNG.

Thus he speaks to his professed disciples, “If ye love me, keep my commandments.—If a man love me, he will keep my words:—He that loveth me not, keepeth not my sayings*.” Can we bear to be tried by this test? Is our religion of a practical sort? Is our faith accompanied and evidenced by that unfeigned respect to Christ, which will regulate our temper and conduct according to his will and precepts? Otherwise, it is not genuine and sincere. There are many hypocritical pretenders, to whom he addresses that solemn reproof, “Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say†.” And those only, who yield an uniform obedience to all his injunctions, He will acknowledge to be

* John xiv. 15, 23, 24.

† Luke vi. 46.

truly attached to him or his gospel. For thus he has determined the case, “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you *.” Hence it will appear, in vindication of that faith, which justifies its possessor,

III. It produceth love to man. This is the main consideration in order to evince its efficacy in the promotion of good works. For if such be its excellent fruit, who shall speak evil of it? Who shall again urge the objection, that it is of an antinomian tendency, and leads to licentiousness? Let it be tried, then, by this test, Does it work by love to our fellow-creatures? It is the very mark, by which our Lord directs us to examine and to prove our regard and our devotedness to Him. “This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another †.” His apostles are all in perfect unison upon the subject. St. Paul, who with so much energy maintains the doctrine of our full justification by faith alone, with equal energy insists upon meekness, peace, and love, among Christians, as the fruits of that faith. Such are his exhortations, “Let love be without dissimulation: Be kindly affectioned one to another, with brotherly love.—Brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for

* John xv. 14.

† John xv. 12. xiii. 35.

an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another:—for the fruit of the Spirit is love, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, and goodness.—Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children, and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us.—Put on (as the elect of God, holy and beloved) bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another: and above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness *.”

The design of St. James is the same, when he reproves the pretended believer, and shews that “faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.” For he enquires, “If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily^u food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be you warmed and filled: notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; What doth it profit †?”—St. John, who seems in a remarkable measure to have imbibed the spirit of his Master, enlarges on the point with a beautiful simplicity: “He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him: but he that hateth his brother is in darkness. We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren; he that loveth not his brother, abideth in death.

* Rom. xii. 9, 10. Gal. v. 13, 22. Eph. v. 1, 2.

Col. iii. 12—14.

† James ii. 15—17.

For whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from Him, that he who loveth God, love his brother also *."

Let us consider the extent of these principles, and faithfully apply them. The knowledge of Jesus Christ presents the mind with such a view of large benevolence and unmerited kindness to the most worthless and abandoned of the human race, as is calculated to subdue the malignant affections, bitterness, wrath, and malice, and to draw forth the heart with compassionate, tender, and kindest dispositions towards all men, even the most ungrateful and injurious. Our Lord has taught us, that no one is to be excluded from our charitable regards, that foreigners and enemies are to be accounted "neighbours," and as such have a claim upon us for our assistance in time of need †. This is a sublime morality, which no other system can furnish.

But while the grace of God will endear to us all mankind, and induce us to wish and labour

* 1 John ii. 10, 11. iii. 14, 17. iv. 20, 21.

† Luke x. 29—37.

for their good, it will knit the heart with peculiar ardour of affection to the true disciples of Christ, “to the saints that are in the earth.” This is “love to the brethren,” which is so much insisted on as the grand criterion of real Christianity: without it we are declared to be in a state of ignorance, guilt, and condemnation. “The brethren” here distinguished should be especially dear to us, not from the general consideration of being partakers of the same common nature, but as being redeemed by the same blood, followers of the same Lord, children of the same Father, united, animated, sanctified by one Spirit, and heirs together of the same glorious inheritance. Do we feel this peculiar attachment to them, though they be reproached, nay for that very reason because they are so, for the name of Christ? Do we share with them, as well in their sorrows, as in their joys? Are we “of the same mind one towards another;—rejoicing with them that do rejoice, and weeping with them that weep*?”

This christian love will fix its highest regards on spiritual concerns, and will excite in us the warmest solicitude for the souls of our brethren. We shall thereby be induced to watch over them with a lively interest, and in fervent prayer to commend their various cases to the favourable

* Rom. xii. 15, 16.

notice of our heavenly Father. We shall grieve for their falls and declensions, and be comforted by their progress and usefulness. We shall therefore admonish and exhort, encourage and strengthen them, according to their characters and states. Are these, we ask, the brotherly affections we possess and manifest?—Their temporal necessities are of infinitely less moment, but we should not be unmindful of them. The sincerity and the degree of our love will appear in our vigorous exertions to relieve the bodily wants of the poor and distressed members of Christ's church. We shall feed the hungry, clothe the naked, minister to the sick, "visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction." In how many ways shall we find opportunities of testifying our regard to Christ by our compassionate and liberal attentions to his indigent people. Let us feel a portion of His love, and then like Him we shall "go about doing good," and esteem it "more blessed to give than to receive."

This is christian morality: this is evangelical obedience,—“faith working by love.” How much is implied in it! It supposes that the evil tempers, which predominate in our fallen nature, are effectually restrained and subdued;—that pride, envy, selfishness, strife and contention, anger and revenge, though they exist, cannot reign in true believers. Such is the apostolic

description, "They that are Christ's, have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts *." But they possess more than a negative goodness: holy principles are implanted in them, and produce the most beneficial effects. Love contains within itself a system of practical righteousness. It is "the fulfilling of the law †:" and therefore there is nothing, which the commandments of God enjoin, which love would not incline us to admire and perform.

Still the question may recur, How is it that holiness derives its origin and its vigour from faith? The connection between the two is expressly and repeatedly declared. This might suffice us: but, upon a serious consideration of the subject, some reasons may be assigned. We are observed in general to be assimilated to the object, which we are accustomed to behold and to contemplate with delight. Is it therefore wonderful, that the believer, who is ever looking to Jesus with increasing admiration, should copy after that perfect pattern of the sublimest and most extended benevolence, and labour to possess the same mind, which was in Him? Or is it to be supposed, that malignity can dwell in the heart of any one, who converses much with Him? But the true cause is, that faith is the appointed medium of communication with Christ; it is the channel, by which he has engaged to convey his

* Gal. v. 24.

† Rom. xiii. 10.

sanctifying grace to our souls, and that by fresh supplies from day to day. His word of direction and of promise to us is, "Look unto me, and be ye saved*:" and if we have made the trial, we shall be able to give this testimony of the proposed expedient, "We all with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord†."

Our defect in love, then, arises from the weakness or the frequent interruptions of our faith. How necessary is the petition, "Lord, help our unbelief!" How great is the guilt, and how lamentable the effects, of forgetting our dependence upon the Saviour! Let our regard to Him be more lively and permanent, if we would make progress in the mortification of sin, and in real sanctification. We shall thus be growing up in all things to our exalted Head, especially in that most excellent grace of Charity, which is so highly commended and so strenuously enforced by him, who was a bright example of it‡;—in that Charity, which is superior to faith and hope, as being their principal end; and which will remain and flourish, when faith shall be terminated in vision, and hope in everlasting enjoyment. How beneficial are its effects in life, both to the church and to society at large! How glorious its final

* Isaiah xlv. 22.

† 2 Cor. iii. 18.

‡ 1 Cor. xiii.

issue to the possessor, who will be received into those habitations, where all will be peace and love for ever !

Why then, we ask again, why should you object to that importance, which is given to faith ? Take a large view of its nature and its tendencies, and you will see no danger in the most zealous promotion of such a principle. Examine only, Do you really possess it, and feel its full influence ? O rest not in speculations about evangelical truth, or in a profession of the most orthodox creed ; and dread the condemnation of those, who “ have a name that they live, and are dead *.” — “ For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also †.”

* Rev. iii. 1.

† James ii. 26.

ESSAY XLVII.

ON FAITH OVERCOMING THE WORLD.

The practical tendency of faith appears in its raising the Christian above present things,—giving him the victory over the love of the world,—over the fear of its threats and persecution,—over all the calamities of life and the terror of death. It possesses this energy, as being a realizing conviction of eternal things,—as placing God himself before us,—and as deriving strength and vigour from the Saviour.

“A Christian is the highest style of man.” His character is not properly estimated, and his value is not well understood. “The world knoweth him not,” perceives not his excellency, is not acquainted with his principles, motives, hopes, or designs, and has no conceptions of the nature or grounds of his happiness. He is, as we have shewn, a believer in Jesus Christ. This is his peculiar discrimination; and by this he participates of all the blessings of redemption. But the faith, which admits him to the highest privileges,

is of a holy tendency. It produces the best practical effects, and possesses a most powerful influence in the government of the tempers and the regulation of the whole conduct.

In confirmation of this remark, and to guard against objections and abuses, we have considered the declaration of one apostle, that it “worketh by love,” exciting love in all its varied exercises both to God and man: with the same view we now turn our attention to the description, which another apostle gives, “IT OVERCOMETH THE WORLD *.” No higher commendation of it, no stronger proof of its sanctifying nature, can be desired. It elevates the soul above all the snares and trials of an evil world, the assaults of which it renders vain and ineffectual. The world has ever been a formidable enemy to those, who would serve the Lord Christ. In how many ways does it tempt, allure, seduce, or deter them from a bold profession of his truth, and a faithful adherence to his cause! There is, therefore, an arduous conflict to be maintained; and sometimes perhaps the foe may gain such advantages, that it may appear doubtful on which side victory will declare. But the true Christian finally prevails: the faith, which he possesses, enables him to overcome, and his conquest is a most glorious one indeed. A conquest, however, this is, not

* 1 John v. 4.

celebrated by the noisy applauses of men, or recorded with honourable mention in the page of history among those, who have been renowned for courage, who have spread carnage and desolation by the sword: but it is noticed and admired by those who are the most competent judges, saints and angels; and it will become us to adore the grace of God in it.—Consider

I. The victory. There is no opposition, so long as you are “earthly and sensual,” and are content to swim down the stream of vanity and fashion: but be chiefly solicitous for your eternal salvation, be devout and heavenly-minded, declare your abhorrence of prevailing principles and practices, “come out and be ye separate,” and then you will experience difficulties, of which you had no experience before. A vigorous attack will be made upon you; every affection and motive of which your heart is susceptible will be tried; advantages will be proposed, and calamities threatened, smiles and frowns will be made use of in their turns, to conciliate or to terrify; and nothing will satisfy your enemy but an entire renunciation of your plan. Will the believer, then, tamely submit, and for the sake of interest or ease, of reputation or carnal indulgence, surrender up his principles, his conscience, his soul, his Saviour, and his God? No: when he enters on the service of Christ, he enlists under His banner and becomes a soldier, willing

and determined, by the grace of God, to fight to the last extremity, to risk and to suffer the loss of all things, rather than yield the victory to his adversary. He “endures hardness,” by a course of severe discipline, vigilance, and self-denial, by a continual recurrence of sharp struggles, and perhaps by some dishonourable defeats. But before the final termination of the warfare, even while engaged on the field of battle, he is a conqueror, not only as being assured of a happy issue at the last, but even now as rising above opposition, defying all his enemies, and being enabled to withstand and baffle their various machinations.

1. He triumphs over the love of the world. It allures the senses by the proposal of gratifications adapted to their taste; it flatters the vanity of the mind by promises of high advancement, favour, and admiration: and these are fatal snares to thousands. See, with what vast labour and assiduity men are pursuing after the acquisition of riches, or some temporal emoluments;—with what ardent desire they are seeking vain distinctions and honours from the applause of their fellow-creatures! These are the objects, which they foolishly prefer to God and their souls, and by which they have been turned aside or prevented from attending, with any thing like true fervour, to their spiritual concerns. Thus St. Paul deplores the case of “Demas,” who “had forsaken

him, having loved this present world," and declares, "They that will be rich, fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition: for the love of money is the root of all evil; which while some have coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows*." Others again, whose minds may have been impressed with serious convictions and good desires, are checked in their religious ardour and violate their most solemn resolutions through the solicitation of their passions, when the means and opportunities of indulgence are placed before them. What schemes of idle parade, what pleasurable amusements, what a variety of gratifications, are contrived to pollute the imagination, and to seduce the senses, and thereby to enslave and ruin the soul! No wonder, that those, who are not established in grace, greedily catch at the bait, are taken, and destroyed. What will they not sacrifice for a beloved lust?

Here then we see the superiority of the true believer. He also is tempted, and he feels corrupt propensities, and sensual inclinations. But by virtue of the spiritual principle within him, he manfully resists, he disdains to submit. He discovers the insidious design of an enemy, and sets

* 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10. 2 Tim. iv. 10.

himself with vigour to maintain the conflict. He refuses not, indeed, the bounties of heaven : he may be exalted and affluent ; and then he considers his power, his influence, his money, as so many talents to be improved for the benefit of his Lord's household and the honour of his name. Let him not be charged with gloom or moroseness : he can enjoy the comforts of life, according to his station, and render praises unto God. But he rejects with scorn the offers of gain or any gratification to be purchased at the expence of conscience. He will therefore sit loose to all earthly possessions ; and so far from being a sensualist, he will watch against any excesses, to which he may be tempted, and be chiefly solicitous to maintain a spiritual frame of mind. Thus only can he act suitably to his character, as " a stranger and a pilgrim on the earth," whose " conversation is in heaven." Thus Moses withstood all the allurements of the Egyptian court, and Daniel those of the Babylonian. These were illustrious instances of a noble superiority to the world. How honourable to religion ! What decided proofs of its mighty efficacy !

But while you admire the character, examine whether in any degree you resemble it. Are you not strangers to the exalted principle, of which we speak ; captivated by the pleasures or the pride of life, with eager and tumultuous desires seeking all your happiness in them ? This is not

an enviable state. The world makes large promises, but it will disappoint all your expectations. And to what an abject slavery does it reduce you! It has the entire dominion, and tyrannizes over you. Will you not assert your liberty, nor make one effort to gain the victory? The ambitious, the covetous, the gay, the sensual, are all “the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage*.” How different from that sublimity of sentiment and freedom of conduct which the Christian possesses under the lively influence of his principles!

2. He triumphs over the fear of the world. That holy singularity, which marks his character, will expose him to certain difficulties. It will excite the scorn and hatred of those, who are acting on a different plan, the ignorant, the careless, and the profane: and probably they will direct their envenomed shafts against him. He will be derided, threatened, and forsaken by associates and relatives; his prospects in life may be marred, and it may possibly appear doubtful, whether he may not be deprived even of the means of subsistence. Such opposition has been frequent, wherever the peculiar doctrines of the gospel have been zealously maintained, and their power manifested “in righteousness and true

* 2 Peter ii. 19.

holiness.” Thus it was foretold, and it has been exemplified in the history of the church from the beginning, that “all, who will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution*.” God be thanked, for the present we stand in no dread of bonds or imprisonment, the rack or the stake. But serious inconveniences may be apprehended; and ridicule alone is a powerful engine, which is often played off with success against those, who discover any earnest desires to live “as becomes the gospel.” “The fear of man bringeth a snare†.” How many are diverted from their purpose by frowns and menaces! How many, to avoid an ignominious name or the laughter of fools, relinquish or conceal their principles!

But he, who feels the power of divine faith, is not so overcome. He may be grievously annoyed and shaken for a time, but he rises superior to the difficulty. He has counted the cost, and is willing to suffer. He consults not the world, what his religious creed or his plan of conduct should be. He hears and obeys the call of his Saviour, to “deny himself, to take up his cross, and to follow Him:” and whoever may dissuade or resist him, he marches on his way with a holy firmness. He says, “I cannot love father or mother, wife or children, more than Christ: dear as you may be to me, I am bound by a higher

* 2 Tim. iii. 12.

† Prov. xxix. 25.

relation: I am not at liberty therefore to comply with your wishes; for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ*." He ought not to court opposition for its own sake, or to provoke it by any intemperate zeal, contempt of order, extravagant or imprudent exertions. But while he is walking in the clear path of duty, closely adhering to the directions and example of his Master, he ought not to be deterred by any sufferings: and the grace of God will enable him to meet them cheerfully, and to rejoice in them as an honourable badge and a high privilege.

This is not an imaginary picture. See an instance of the case, in those three worthies, who could despise the threats of the enraged tyrant, and go down undaunted into "the burning fiery furnace," because they believed in God †. Mark the fortitude and the triumph of the apostles of our Lord, after being imprisoned, scourged, and menaced with further violence; "They departed from the presence of the council, REJOICING THAT THEY WERE COUNTED WORTHY TO SUFFER SHAME FOR HIS NAME ‡." Hear the declaration of another christian warrior, who stood foremost in the ranks of the armies of the faithful, "The Holy Ghost witnesseth in every

* Matt. x. 37, 38. xvi. 24. Gal. i. 10.

† Dan. iii.

‡ Acts v. 41.

city, that bonds and afflictions abide me: but none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy*.” Nor was such triumphant fortitude confined to the apostles. There have been thousands of private Christians, in different ages, who have “endured a great fight of afflictions; partly, whilst they were made a gazing-stock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst they became companions of them that were so used:—who took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing in themselves that they had in heaven a better and an enduring substance:—who had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword;—not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection †.”

Are we prepared to resist, with a similar courage? Can we thus maintain our principles against “an adulterous and sinful generation?” Do we possess such a firmness, as to dread no consequences, which may come upon us for a faithful adherence to our duty? It is a great deliverance, to be raised above the fear of suffering: and without it we shall remain in a wretched state of captivity, and hold our very conscience

* Acts xx. 23, 24.

† Heb. x. 32—34. xi. 35—37.

at the will of others. “But and if we suffer for righteousness’ sake,” is it with “the meekness and gentleness of Christ?” Are we not betrayed into an improper warmth, into peevishness, anger, and resentment? We have not obtained the victory, unless we preserve our own peace and equanimity, and be kind even to our enemies, forbearing and forgiving the most injurious. Such is the honourable Christian: he is “not overcome of evil, but overcomes evil with good *.”

3. He triumphs over the varied calamities, which may be expected in the world. How large the catalogue of human miseries! Poverty, pain, sickness, loathesome and malignant diseases, disappointments, losses, and separations of dearest friends:—these are some of “the thousand ills, which flesh is heir to.” “Man is born unto trouble;” so that there is no place or situation exempt from labour and distress. We should therefore expect and be prepared for afflictions. Alas! how many shrink and bow down! Their spirits faint, and they are overcome. The pressure of their trials is heavier than they can bear; they fret, and pine, and sicken: they indulge that “sorrow of the world, which worketh death:” and being weary of existence, not a few become their own executioners.

Is there no effectual remedy to be applied? No sufficient support to be administered? Yes, in the gospel of Jesus Christ the grand desideratum is contained; but the believer is the only one, who is in actual possession of the secret. He is delivered from vain anxieties and heart-rending fears, through an unreserved dependence upon the God of heaven, and resists every propensity to murmuring and discontent, under this conviction, that all his concerns are ordered by the almighty Sovereign in wisdom, faithfulness, and love. Whatever dispensations are appointed for him, it is his privilege not to sorrow as do others, but to bear up, to exercise patience and submission, to possess peace and hope and joy. “He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord*.” “Thou, Lord, wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee; because he trusteth in Thee†.” He can say therefore, “I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content‡.” And, “knowing that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose,”—he may adopt that sublime exultation, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?—Nay,

* Psalm cxii. 7.

† Isaiah xxvi. 3.

‡ Phil. iv. 11.

in all these things we are MORE THAN CONQUERORS, through Him that loved us *."

"The last enemy," with which he has to struggle, is Death: and it must be allowed, that this appears a truly formidable enemy indeed. How many are appalled with terror at its approach! The very dread of it imbitters every present comfort to thousands, "who through fear of death are all their life-time subject to bondage †." Some through ignorance, through inconsideration, or infidelity, may be lulled into a stupor, and manifest a perfect indifference about the event. But let a man understand his true state and character, and be properly aware of the nature of that eternal world, into which he is about to enter, and he will find nothing capable of comforting or at all composing his mind, except the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. It is the believer's privilege to be raised above the fear of his dissolution, to view it in all its consequences, to smile at and even to long for its arrival. This confidence he obtains entirely through the crucified Redeemer, who says to death, "I will be thy plagues," and to the grave, "I will be thy destruction ‡." Whatever horrors, therefore, this dreaded foe might once excite, it is subdued; it appears to him to

* Rom. viii. 28, 35, 37.

† Heb. ii. 15.

‡ Hosea xiii. 14.

be deprived of its sting, and to have lost its power of doing any injury. In grateful adoration he exclaims, “ Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ:” and so far from being reluctant to quit this earthly tabernacle, he declares, “ I have a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better*.” This is a glorious triumph indeed, compared to which that of the most illustrious conqueror of cities and kingdoms is low and contemptible. The grandest sight exhibited on earth is the dying Christian, strong in faith, lively in hope, and fervent in love, exulting in his God and Saviour, as he goes out of the world. To this important crisis we are all hastening. Are we prepared for the conflict? Or what reason have we to expect the victory? Then consider

II. The means of obtaining it. No power of fallen nature, no rules of philosophers, no system of ethics, will furnish the necessary expedient. The mere formal profession of Christianity will not produce this magnanimity of mind. Nothing but that vital principle of FAITH, which is appropriate to the real Christian, possesses influence sufficient. “ Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God †?” He, and he alone, is superior to allurements, to opposition, to calamities, and to

* 1 Cor. xv. 57. Phil. i. 23.

† 1 John v. 5.

death. He may with composure contemplate the attacks of all his enemies, and challenge them to do their worst, “persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate him from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord *.”

Such is the mighty energy of faith, and it produces these effects in the following ways.

1. As it is a realizing conviction of God’s testimony concerning eternal things. It presents them to the view of the mind, it fixes so deep an impression of their truth, magnitude, and importance, as to render all worldly considerations of little or no moment. It “is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen †.” From this cause it is, that the awakened penitent is enabled to break loose from the world, and to despise its threats. For he argues, “Why should I be afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do? But I will fear Him, who after He hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I will fear Him ‡.” Thus also he is taught to look down with contempt upon all the gaudy shew and tempting offers, which solicit his notice upon earth. For

* Rom. viii. 38, 39.

† Heb. xi. 1.

‡ Luke xii. 4, 5.

now he sees, that “the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; and all the grace of the fashion of it perisheth *.” His attention is fixed upon nobler objects; the divine favour, and the felicities of heaven; and for the attainment of these he exerts his most strenuous efforts. He says, “My supreme desire is to be reconciled to Him, whose loving-kindness is better than life: I will seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; trusting that all other things, which may be really needful, will be added unto me †.” From the same principle, when he is tempted to associate with the careless and profane, considering what their end will be, and fully persuaded of their approaching misery, he will resolutely refuse to be conformed to them, and instead of envying them their enjoyments, he will commiserate their wretched state. He will reply to their solicitations, “Because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience: I cannot therefore be a partaker with them ‡.” Such conduct may be thought foolish and mean by those, who look not beyond the present scene; but, viewed in the light of eternity, it will appear wise and dignified.

Faith will also give this energy to our minds,

2. As placing God himself before us. If it

* 1 John ii. 17. James i. 11.

† Psalm lxxiii. 3. Matth. vi. 33.

‡ Eph. v. 6, 7.

be, as we speak, the eye of the soul, which penetrates into the unseen world, it will so powerfully impress us with the continual presence of Jehovah, as to become a lively principle of action. Like Moses, we shall be enabled to “endure, as seeing Him who is invisible*.” We shall then care but little about the opinions of men, nor shall we be greatly “afraid of ten thousands of people, who may set themselves against us round about†.” It is thus only that the believer learns, “to be in the fear of the Lord all the day long‡.” Then he can stand with an invincible firmness against temptation, and say, “How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God:—for all my ways are before Him§?” He cannot be satisfied, as others, with external decency, but, desiring to approve himself to God, he watches over the thoughts and intents of his heart; for he says, “Thou, God, seest me||.” Nor will he be cast down, when earthly comforts fail, since the Lord is to him “a very present help in trouble:” and thus he accounts for his own composure and courage in circumstances of apparent danger, “I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved**.” Does a host of enemies compass him about?

* Heb. xi. 27.

† Psalm iii. 6.

‡ Prov. xxiii. 17.

§ Gen. xxxix. 9. Psalm cxix. 168.

|| Gen. xvi. 13.

** Psalm xlvi. 1. xvi. 8.

While others in great perplexity and terror cry, "Alas, how shall we do?" he can answer, "Fear not: for they that be with us, are more than they that be with them*." Or does he "walk through the valley of the shadow of death?" You may wonder at his peace; but he exclaims, "I will fear no evil, for thou, Lord, art with me†." Here the secret is unfolded, and you perceive one cause of the efficacy of this wonder-working principle, which "giveth him the victory." Another must be added. It enables him to persevere and to triumph,

3. As it exhibits the dying Saviour, and is a cordial reliance upon Him for all spiritual blessings. This consideration also, which enters into its very essence, will shew its practical influence in delivering its possessor from an undue attachment to present things. When Jesus Christ is duly regarded, He will so engage the thoughts and affections of the soul, that other objects, which were once idolized, will be abandoned or but little esteemed. While multitudes, therefore, are grasping at earthly possessions or enjoyments, at something more or something higher, the believer "takes up his cross and follows Christ;" and be his rank, abilities, or wealth, what they may, he will look on them with comparative indifference, and say, "God forbid, that I should glory, save

* 2 Kings vi. 16.

† Psalm xxiii. 4.

in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world *!" Do you wonder at his activity and zeal? He will ask, "Is there not a cause?" and he sufficiently explains the nature and efficacy of his principles, by telling you, "The love of Christ constrains him;" and now, from a sense of gratitude, he thinks nothing too much to be done for Him, who so loved him, as to give himself for him. To this dear Lord and Saviour he is continually looking for fresh supplies, and in this very way he receives communications of strength and vigour, which carry him through all difficulties, and render him superior to opposition. This is the true cause, why the Christian perseveres and finishes his course with joy, while others faint, decline, and perish. He is united by faith to his exalted Head, a living member of his mystical body; and then "he can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth him †."

We are led to enquire, Where is such a character to be found? Where is he, "that overcometh the world?" Few pretend to this attainment, and those few are very defective. Alas! what remissness among those, who are generally esteemed believers! what conformity to the vain customs and corrupt maxims of ungodly men! what sad declensions and inconsistencies do we

* Gal. vi. 14.

† Phil. iv. 13.

hear of! Of what sort is our faith; and what has been its efficacy in the regulation of our tempers and practice?

The description given contains a high commendation of the principle of believing, on which so much depends in the christian system. Let it not be said, that it is of a dangerous tendency. We have marked its excellence in these various respects, as it subdues pride, ambition, selfishness, and sensuality, and as it inspires the soul with gratitude, courage, zeal, and heavenly-mindedness; as it confirms holy resolutions, administers consolation in trouble, and exultation in death, while it opens the prospect of everlasting bliss and glory. Is this to be objected to? But we apprehend that many are averse to it on this very account, because it is not consistent with a forgetfulness of God and the love of present things. They wish for a more easy and compliant system, which will allow them to be earthly and sensual, and to gratify every carnal desire of their hearts.

Then let the world have your warmest affections, and pursue with unabated ardor the objects it proposes. But what will it do for you? Will it not elude your grasp, and frustrate your expectations? How uncertain, and how poor are its best possessions and enjoyments! They can afford you no support in trouble, no consoling prospect in futurity; and very soon they will all desert

you. Then what refuge will remain? How tremendous your state, if it should be said to you in that day, “Go, and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation *!” But make the Lord God almighty your portion, by faith surrendering up all to Him, and “He will never leave you nor forsake you †.”

* Judges x. 14.

† Heb. xiii. 5.

ESSAY XLVIII.

ON FAITH PRODUCING JOY.

The principle of faith is commended to our regard as promoting present comfort, by affording the hope of reconciliation with God,—by giving assurance of support under troubles, and of their happy termination,—by opening a prospect of heaven,—and by producing a foretaste of future blessedness.—The gloom of persons accounted religious may arise—from indisposition of body or mind,—from temptation,—from a defect of faith,—or from declension and misconduct.

IF we were solicitous to engage our friends in any particular pursuit, we should probably endeavour to convince them, not only of its excellency, but of its tendency to promote their honour, their interest, or their happiness. These at least are considerations, which would excite attention, and be most likely to prevail. By such arguments we would persuade men to embrace the offer of that Saviour, who proposes himself to their acceptance, and to intrust him with all their spiritual concerns. Why should they be

averse to the principle of dependence upon Christ? It will secure to them inestimable blessings; it will exalt them to the highest privileges and distinctions; it will bring them to the possession of unsearchable riches; it will fill them with strong and unspeakable consolation.

Let our present regard be directed to the last mentioned circumstance. Faith is calculated to disperse all our fears, or it will raise us above them; it will inspire hope, and peace, and joy. Who would not desire to possess it? It is the eye of the soul, by which we discover the most interesting objects. It is fixed upon the Lord Jesus, as making peace by his blood, and the view of his grace and glory produces increasing admiration and love. It follows him to the bright world above, and there beholds a reconciled God and Father, a God in covenant engaged to supply all the wants of his redeemed people, and to perfect their salvation, ready to bestow upon them a kingdom which He has prepared, and proposing himself to them as their everlasting portion. Are not these discoveries the source of constant and exquisite delight? And are not those, who are favoured with them, the only happy men? Though they have not seen their Redeemer with their bodily eyes, “yet believing in him they rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory*.” It may be useful to point

* 1 Pet. 1. 8.

out and enlarge upon such considerations, as will shew the tendency of faith to impart to its possessors present peace and felicity.

1. It affords the hope of reconciliation with God. What distress is equal to that, which arises from the horrors of a guilty conscience? Poverty, pain, sickness, are as nothing compared to those poisoned arrows, which “drink up the spirit.” The whole world can yield us no satisfaction, when “the terrors of God do set themselves in array against us.” No deliverance therefore can be so great as that, which releases us from the dread of the fierce anger of almighty God. Only let His wrath be removed, and the light of His countenance shine, then will the heart be cheered, and no worldly troubles occasion any lasting dejection, or prevent loud thanksgivings from ascending to heaven. It is faith, which points to the cross of Christ, as removing the curse and procuring the favour of God. Then the way is opened to the throne of grace, and we obtain “boldness and access with confidence*.” “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace, wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God†.”

Is this objected to, as if it were extravagant

* Eph. iii. 12.

† Rom. v. 1, 2.

and irrational? Shall the malefactor, under the dread of his execution suddenly receiving a full and free pardon, be allowed to utter the most rapturous expressions of joy? And shall not the believer, who is rescued from everlasting misery, and adopted as a beloved child into the family of God, be allowed to declare his happiness? What obligations or mercies are equal to his? Let him take up his words, for they are purposely prepared for his use, “O Lord, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me *.” Such is the effect produced, and such the glad anthems which are sung, wherever men are brought to “the obedience of faith,” and receive “the knowledge of salvation by the remission of their sins.” Thus the believing Eunuch “went on his way rejoicing;” and the awakened jailor, who a little before had trembled with all the horrors of despair, being instructed in the hope of the gospel “rejoiced, believing in God with all his house †.” Let us say, then, “Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance: in thy name shall they rejoice all the day; and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted.—Happy is that people, that is in such a case; yea, happy is that people, whose God is the Lord ‡!” Believers, may

* Isa. xii. 1. † Acts viii. 39. xvi. 34.

‡ Psal. lxxxix. 15, 16. cxliv. 15.

you be sensible of the value and extent of your privileges, be diligent to improve them, and live in the full enjoyment of them !

2. It gives assurance of support under troubles, and of their happy termination. The faith, which admits us into the favour and family of God, does not promise us any exemption from the common calamities of life, but rather teaches us to look for “ much tribulation,” instructing us, that “ whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth*.” But it credits his gracious declarations, that He will be with us when we pass through the deep waters of affliction and temptation, that “ his grace shall be sufficient for us,” and that he chastens us “ for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness†.” In full persuasion that he will not violate his engagements, nor disappoint those expectations which are grounded on his word, we may triumph in all our distresses. “ We glory in tribulations ; knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.—Therefore we take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake, that the power of

* Hebr. xii. 6.

† Isa. xliii. 1, 2. 2 Cor. xii. 9. Hebr. xii. 10.

Christ may rest upon us.—Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet we will rejoice in the Lord, we will joy in the God of our salvation *.”

Those surely, who enjoy most of this spirit, and not such as possess the highest exaltation or the largest share of worldly treasures, are the happiest persons in life: and it is faith alone in the divine promises, which inspires this confidence. Believers then, who feel the comfort of their own principles, however afflicted, are most of all to be envied. How wretched are others, who have no access to God through Christ, no hope in his covenant! They are indeed proper objects of compassion: for take away their earthly delights, and what have they left? In general they discover their misery by their discontent and peevishness, their profane murmurings, their despairing fears, their rebellious opposition to God. O be thankful for the consolations, which the gospel administers, and be solicitous to shew the reality, the strength, and excellence of your faith, especially in trouble! Prove that you can trust and rejoice in the Lord, when every thing else is withdrawn. “The ex-

* Rom. v. 3—5. 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10. Hab. iii. 17, 18.

ceeding great and precious promises," which are given you in Christ, are intended to cheer your spirits when ready to faint, and to "fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost *:" and they are all "yea and amen," firm and inviolable.

3. It opens a prospect of heaven, and encourages the expectation of an everlasting enjoyment of its felicity and glory. "The substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen †," unfolds to view the invisible world, and gives the Christian a full conviction of its certainty, and of his own title to it through the righteousness of his Redeemer. The effect of this conviction must be strong and irresistible, in the alleviation of human misery and the promotion of happiness. What so likely to dispel gloom and fear, to support and animate the soul under its heaviest burdens! Let us hear the declaration of primitive believers. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God unto salva-

* Rom. xv. 13.

† Heb. xi. 1.

tion, ready to be revealed in the last time ; wherein ye greatly rejoice.—Through our Lord Jesus Christ we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.—The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory, which shall be revealed in us *.”

To this source of consolation our Lord referred his sorrowing disciples, and encouraged them to rise above all their distresses and their most painful apprehensions, in the prospect of heaven. “ Fear not little flock ; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.—Let not your heart be troubled : ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions ; if it were not so, I would have told you ; I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also.—Ye now have sorrow ; but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice ; and your joy no man taketh from you †.” It is the office of faith to realize and appropriate these assurances ; and then how great is its energy ! What confidence and courage does it inspire ! What an exalted triumph does it enable the Christian to maintain ! By virtue of this principle “ the noble army of martyrs” de-

* 1 Pet. i. 3—6. Rom. v. 1, 2. viii. 18.

† Luke xii. 32. John xiv. 1—3. xvi. 22.

spised the threatenings of their most furious persecutors, and “for the joy that was set before them” exulted in their sufferings, in dungeons, in tortures, and in flames. Thousands also among ourselves, though destitute of all worldly comforts, treated with supercilious contempt, pining with sickness, or racked with pain, are consoled by the expectation that “God will soon wipe away all tears from their eyes, that there shall be no more curse, that they shall see his face, and reign with him for ever and ever *.” This is no wild imagination, no idle revery: it is rational and substantial happiness. But what is human life without it? What a gloom must be cast upon the brightest scenes of earthly joy, if the hope of heaven be removed, and death is to close the whole!

4. It produces a foretaste of future blessedness. It is of the very essence of faith to bring near to the mind things which are remote; and hence it does more than inspire hope, it gives a sort of present possession of those “good things” which God hath prepared for and promised to them that love him. “We which have believed do enter into rest;” we participate and enjoy even now a measure of “that rest, which remaineth for the people of God †.” To some persons this may appear utterly unintelligible: but let them

* Rev. xxi. 4. xxii. 3—5.

† Hebr. iv. 3, 9.

not therefore deny or deride what they do not understand. Will they assert, there are no attainments or delights beyond those which they have known? Should they not credit the declarations of solid and judicious Christians, who cannot fairly be charged with extravagance or enthusiasm, and who maintain, they are happy in God beyond what they can express, and in their most favoured moments are carried so much above the body, and above all sensual and earthly pleasures, as to seem to themselves to be upon the very verge of heaven?

This their testimony is no other than a confirmation of those descriptions, which the sacred writers have given of the present felicity of believers. For they speak of them, as “having everlasting life,”—“seeing God,”—being “abundantly satisfied with the fatness of his house, and drinking of the river of his pleasures;”—as “having fellowship with him,”—and “joying in Him;”—as favoured with his presence, the light of his countenance, the residence of his spirit, the manifestation of his love, and “rejoicing with joy unspeakable and FULL OF GLORY*.” If these things are not realized and experienced in modern times, will not the scriptures be brought into

* John iii 36. Psalm lxiii. 2. xxxvi. 8. 1 John i. 3. Rom. v. 11. Psalm xxiii. 4. iv. 6. 1 Cor. vi. 19. John xiv. 21. 1 Peter i. 8.

suspicion, or the vital influence of our religion seem to be evaporated? But we thank God, that our principles produce an energy of the same sort which distinguished the ancient and primitive believers. These spiritual and heavenly delights are not only to be read of; but living and credible witnesses can attest that they are enjoyed in the present day, and having "tasted that the Lord is gracious," they invite and encourage others to come and participate of their blessedness. Why are you unwilling to make the trial? Is not the object worthy your attention? Will it not compensate all your exertions? O be persuaded to turn from worldly vanities, and aspire after this felicity, which is the highest attainment of human nature!

Here then we behold the happy tendency and excellent effects of faith: for all this results entirely from believing on the Son of God. The possessions of the world cannot confer on those, who most abound in them, any enjoyment to be compared to this, either in degree or in kind. They never fill or satisfy the mind; but they excite tumultuous desires, which they can neither gratify nor appease; so that "VANITY AND VEXATION OF SPIRIT" is their just description. Nor can philosophy thus elevate the minds of its votaries. It makes no pretensions to such happiness, but possibly may exclaim against it, as fanciful and irrational, proceeding from a wild ima-

gination or heated affections, which may be attended with dangerous consequences.

Many may allow its reality, and eagerly desire it, but mistake the way of attaining it. They may “seek it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law *;” and, through such an error they may remain in extreme distress, and “labour in the very fire.” For the most punctual attention to the duties of morality, the most rigorous performance of religious services, will always leave upon the conscience a sense of guilt and a dread of condemnation, where there is any sound instruction and spiritual perception of the extent of God’s righteous demands. It is the Saviour alone, who bestows the blessing, and He promises it upon our submission. Let us hear his voice, and comply with his invitation, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I WILL GIVE YOU REST †.”

Against the whole of this representation a strong objection is brought. It is urged, that many of those who appear most cordially to receive the gospel, and to place their whole dependence upon Christ, are far from being happy, discover much gloom, and are perplexed with many fears. We allow, that we do not always see that peace, that cheerfulness, and vigour, among persons accounted truly devout, which we

* Rom. ix. 32.

† Matt. xi. 28.

might expect from their principles. We admit the fact stated in the objection, but we deny the inference. We lament the symptoms of melancholy and despondency, where from the tendency of pure religion we might look for calmness, confidence, and joy. To some this is a stumbling block; and we are called upon to reconcile it with the sentiments here advanced. Let the subject, then, be considered. The appearance is unfavourable, but “wisdom is justified of all her children*.”

1. There may be in those who possess the christian faith, such a bodily indisposition as may prevent, suspend, or diminish their spiritual comforts. The natural infirmities, to which all are subject, sickness, pain, or fever, may possibly obstruct or impair the exercise of their mental faculties. Nay, the mind itself, from causes unknown to us, but perfectly unconnected with religion, may be much darkened and depressed. Gloom and even horror may be experienced by those, who have enjoyed a high degree of felicity in communion with God, and who may yet remain the objects of his peculiar care and love. Their case demands our compassion, but furnishes no proper exception against the general tendency of Christianity to promote present peace.

2. The faithful servants of God are also sub-

* Luke vii. 35.

ject to a variety of temptations, which during their prevalence may repress all their spiritual vigour, darken their views, deprive them of their hopes, and bring upon them extreme dejection. We know, that the design of their great adversary is to drive them to despair, and thereby to cast a foul reproach upon religion, as if its best friends might be miserable. But in such a situation are they proper witnesses to be appealed to? For the time they appear to be carried away by an enemy, and through the confusion and perplexity of their minds to speak his language rather than their own; for at another time they would disavow and abhor it. It is therefore unfair to decide the question by their occasional and temporary distress, which is a sort of suspension of their usual liveliness and joy. Thus St. Peter describes the case of believers deprived of the comfort of their own principles: "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season (if need be) ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations*." Thus also St. Paul himself, after being favoured with "abundance of revelations," and "caught up into Paradise, where he heard unspeakable words," was thrown into an agony of distress by "the thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him†," as if he had been abandoned of his God.

* 1 Pet. i. 6,

† 2 Cor. xii. 4, 7,

3. The gloom of many, who profess a cordial attachment to the gospel, may arise from a defect of faith. We are very incompetent judges of characters, and are often too hasty in our decisions. Where men express an approbation of christian principles, and give a regular attendance on the ordinances of grace, it is not uncommonly concluded that they are real believers; whereas they may still remain in a state of ignorance, and may never have taken upon them the yoke of Christ. Is it then to be wondered at, that they know nothing of the excellence, the freedom, the blessedness of his service? Their inconsistency may be to them a source of painful apprehensions.—But even those, who have truly submitted to the Saviour, may yet from various causes be so perplexed by dark and erroneous views of the gospel, as to be prevented from enjoying its comforts. They may be a long time before they come to the simplicity of faith; they may be setting up standards of spiritual attainment, which they will never reach; and looking for evidences in themselves, which they will never find; and therefore their perplexity and depression of mind should be referred to a measure of ignorance and unbelief still remaining in them. With a clearer discovery of the fulness and sufficiency of the grace of Christ, and a more entire reliance upon him, they would be established in peace. But it should also be recollected,

that the principle of faith, even in the most eminent persons, is in an imperfect state, and its exercises may be various. Who will not see cause to cry out, "Lord, help my unbelief?" This fluctuation in the mind of Christians interrupts their best enjoyments, and produces such sorrow of heart, as constrains them to say, "We that are in this tabernacle, do groan, being burdened *." But let it not therefore be objected, that their religious system has a tendency to gloom.

4. The distress we are considering may possibly arise from spiritual declension or dishonourable conduct. We may not be aware of the real state of those around us. There may be just cause for the dejection which we witness in many, who have stood high in a christian profession. There may have been some grievous fall, some sad deviation and departure from God; some omissions of duty, and indulgences of wrong tempers, which have grieved the divine Spirit, and caused Him to withdraw his light, and strength, and consolation. Then darkness and horror must be the consequence. But surely no blame attaches to religion on this account; nay rather, it is a striking proof of its excellence. When you look at the backslider, who has lost his confidence and is ready to lie down in despair,

* 2 Cor. v. 4.

then acknowledge that “the joy of faith” is of a holy nature, to be maintained only in a close adherence to God and his service. Pride, covetousness, lust, anger, resentment, strife, and contention, if admitted and cherished in your hearts, will drive away the heavenly visitant, who has formerly cheered you with the tokens of his love, and cause you to exclaim in agony of mind, “Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation*.” O beware of such awful interruptions, if you are now rejoicing in the Lord: and return unto your rest, if you have wandered from him; for he will still deal bountifully with you!

After all, the objection may be utterly unfounded, with respect to many against whom it is brought. You may be mistaken in judging them to be unhappy. Christians have their trials; and, even if they had no burden to carry, they dare not be trifling and dissipated, like the men of the world: and possibly you may condemn them only for their seriousness and the solidity of their deportment. But there may be much inward joy, and a high degree of felicity—those spiritual delights, which you can neither perceive or understand, where there is much gravity of countenance, and an abstinence from “the pomps and vanities of the world.”—But of what sort are your enjoyments? If religion afford

* Psalm li. 12.

you no pleasure, there must be something wrong, either your's is not the religion of the gospel, or you are inconsistent with it. Alas ! how many are satisfied with a dull, lifeless system, a formal attention to devotional duties without any pleasure in them, nay with a secret aversion to them ! This is gross hypocrisy indeed ! And others, we fear, who boast of their assurances and their joys, are deceiving themselves, inasmuch as they derive their happiness from their own fancied excellence, and not from Jesus Christ. To all such that solemn denunciation is addressed, " Behold all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks ; walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled : This shall ye have of mine hand, ye shall lie down in sorrow *."

* Isa. l. 41.

ESSAY XLIX.

ON THE DIVINE ORIGIN OF FAITH.

That faith is the gift of God, proved from various scriptures. This implies more than that God has given us an external revelation,—or opportunities of instruction,—or assistance in the common exercise of our faculties. He alone removes all hindrances in the heart,—disposes sinners to receive Christ,—and enables them to persevere in their dependence. Yet means should be used,—exhortations and arguments employed,—and men may be commended for faith, or punished for the want of it.

THE advantages of believing in the Lord Jesus Christ are great beyond calculation. The short account given in these essays will, it is hoped, excite in many readers the most earnest desires and endeavours to possess that principle, on which so much depends. Yet it is not enough to rouse their serious attention to the subject; various instructions must be delivered and cautions suggested. Some persons are very forward to conclude, that they do and always did believe,

only because they have been educated in the profession and with proper notions of Christianity. Others vainly suppose, that, though they are yet destitute of faith, they can easily take it up at any time. All these are equally ignorant of its high and excellent nature and of its divine origin. It is necessary that their minds should be informed, their presumption checked, and their mistakes obviated. They should be apprized of their own inability, and yet be assured for their encouragement that all needful assistance may be obtained. With this view therefore we would call their attention to the declaration of the apostle, "By grace ye are saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: IT IS THE GIFT OF GOD *."

A declaration so explicit, we should have supposed, could not well be misunderstood or its meaning questioned. For is not this its obvious import, that the principle, which is universally and indispensably requisite, is such as we shall never attain, but by divine aid? It is "not of ourselves;" though in some sense it must be our own, as it implies the voluntary exercise of our mental faculties, and is connected with various dispositions of our minds: yet it is not produced by any wisdom, strength, or goodness, which man in his fallen state possesses. It

“ cometh down from above, from the Father of lights * ;” “ IT IS THE GIFT OF GOD.” He bestows the necessary influence ; that which alone will be efficacious and ensure salvation.

This important position, though expressed in such clear terms, is much controverted. Among other objections it is urged against our interpretation of the passage, that the clause “ not of yourselves” should be referred to the former words “ ye are saved,” and that the apostle meant, not that faith “ is the gift of God,” but that our redemption is so. It may be answered, that such an explanation is unnatural and most absurd, as it makes the latter part of the verse a mere repetition of the preceding. When he had told us, “ BY GRACE ye are saved,” it was needless to add, your salvation is “ not of yourselves, it is the gift of God :” for this is no more than saying, it is “ by grace.”

But the doctrine of the divine origin of faith depends not upon a single text ; it may be clearly collected and firmly established from the united testimonies of various other scriptures. While our Lord deplored the multitudes, who contemptuously rejected his message of mercy, he rejoiced over those who were sincerely disposed to receive it, and ascribed their faith to the influence of God upon their minds. He said, “ I

* James i. 17.

thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes *.” When contending also with the unbelieving Jews, who were elated with the conceit of their own sufficiency, he taught them that divine grace alone could produce in them a cordial submission to himself; “No man can come to me, except the Father, which hath sent me draw him †.”

Agreeably to the instructions of their Master, the apostles uniformly maintained the same truth. Thus St. Paul declared, “No man can say, that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost ‡:” the plain meaning of which is, that we cannot possess those dispositions of mind, which are implied in a sincere acknowledgment of the Saviour’s character, but by the internal operation of the Spirit. The same apostle therefore, considering that in “the work of faith” the mighty energy of God was displayed as much as by the resurrection of Christ, prayed for the Ephesians, that they might know “what is the exceeding greatness of this power towards them who believe §.” The Philippians he congratulates, not on the efficacy of their own pious resolutions or exertions, but on their experience of that grace, by

* Matt. xi. 25.

† John vi. 44.

‡ 1 Cor. xii. 3.

§ Eph. i. 19.

which “IT WAS GIVEN UNTO THEM in the behalf of Christ to believe on him *.” And he reminds the Colossians of the high privileges, to the participation of which they were brought, not by a mere assent of the understanding or rational conviction of the truth of the gospel, but “THROUGH THE FAITH OF THE OPERATION OF GOD †.”

From these and many similar passages, which speak the same language, it is evident that the faith, to which the promises are annexed, is produced by a peculiar and appropriate influence communicated from above. Many persons indeed seem desirous of lowering the meaning, and, with the view of cherishing the pride of man, explain away the whole of this divine influence. But let us be aware of the evil and the danger of such an error, and without attending to the subtleties which are invented for the purpose of evading or corrupting the truth, let us receive with meekness and in their obvious sense the plain declarations of the word of God. Be it our endeavour, then, fairly to investigate, what we are to understand by the assertion, that faith is the gift of God.

1. Much more is implied, than that He has by an external publication revealed the great doctrines we are required to believe. We readily

* Phil. i. 29.

† Col. ii. 12.

admit the position, and maintain it as of the first importance, that our religious system is derived from Him. It is so deep and mysterious as to baffle the pride of human reason ; and it instructs us in matters essential to our peace, where reason could not possibly afford us the least satisfactory information. The Lord is gracious in compassionating our ignorance, and making known to us “ the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting,”—“ through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ.” “ He hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel * :” and he hath favoured us above many people in sending and continuing to us that precious book, which contains the genuine records of his will, the word of truth and salvation. But, thankful as we should be for this inestimable privilege, we should be apprized that thousands with the Bible in their hands perish in unbelief; and therefore that the faith, by which we are saved, and which God alone bestows, is something more than the system of faith given to us in the scriptures, containing a divine revelation. Yet these sacred writings are not to be accounted useless, for to them as the infallible test all religious opinions must be referred, and whatever will not stand that trial, should be

* 2 Tim. i. 10.

considered as foolish or presumptuous conceits, and not the conclusions of divine faith.

2. More is to be understood, than that God has afforded us opportunities of conviction and instruction in the system of Christianity, for in the midst of these we may still remain unbelievers. Faith must in some sense depend upon evidence; but it does not necessarily follow from it. God has given us full and decided testimonies in proof of revelation. In this respect perhaps we are more favoured than the first Christians were, and therefore it could not be said to them exclusively, "your faith is the gift of God," as some would interpret it, because the gospel was confirmed to them by miracles. For by its amazing energy, and the continued completion of prophecy, it has received accumulated and stronger attestations of its truth and excellence. The arguments, we apprehend, are such as after a fair and honest examination are abundantly sufficient to produce conviction in every sincere enquirer. Yet even those, who are constrained to yield their assent, may still be destitute of true faith: that is, they may assent to this proposition, as being established by indubitable evidence, that the Bible contains a divine revelation, and yet possess no suitable regard to Him, who is its grand subject throughout, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Many also refuse to examine those very evi-

dences, which are set before them; or they do it with prejudice, with a secret desire, if not with a determination, not to be persuaded. It is obvious, then, that something more is necessary than the strongest proofs, to give a right direction to the mind. Men may enjoy the greatest advantages for religious instruction, from their situation and connections in life, from their education, friends, ministers, and divine ordinances; and on such persons doubtless God has bestowed more than upon others; for all these are favours which He hath freely granted them. But the gift of faith is more excellent; a gift, which they possibly may neither receive nor desire. We cannot therefore say to them, with any propriety of language, merely on account of their external privileges, "Ye are saved by grace:" for they may finally perish. But we would say, Be thankful for the precious opportunities afforded you, yet afraid of abusing or neglecting them, seek for that influence from above, which alone can render them a blessing to your souls.

3. We are to understand something more by this gift, than that God has endued us with proper faculties for the attainment and exercise of faith, or that he proposes to assist us in their improvement. The faculties, which He hath bestowed, we have basely perverted; and, in this our fallen state, they do not answer their original design. In consequence, no man left to

himself would so use his understanding, as to come to the knowledge of Christ and a sincere reception of the gospel. By the use of our reason in the diligent study of the scriptures we may discover the plan and the terms of salvation, but merely by the use of reason we shall never be enabled to perceive its excellence, or induced to embrace it.

It is said, then, that the Lord has been pleased to offer to all the assistance of his grace, by which they may surmount opposing difficulties, and attain to the true faith, IF THEY WILL.—We need not controvert this sentiment, but may safely allow it in its full force. We conceive however, that it will not conduct us to an adequate or consistent explanation of those scriptures, which represent the faith, to which salvation is annexed, as being a fruit of the Spirit and produced by “the operation of God.” For is this all the difference between a believer and an unbeliever, that the former, without any foreign influence to incline his will, voluntarily chose to improve the offered grace, and that the latter did not chuse it? According to such a notion, that peculiar principle which discriminates the Christian is to be ascribed to himself rather than to God; for faith is not given to him more than to another, and he is not laid under any particular obligations on that account. The sup-

position is unscriptural and absurd in the extreme.

The case is, whatever merciful proposals are made, sinners are disposed to reject them. It is universally true, that men left to themselves would be unwilling to come to Christ, as he requires them to come; and, unless the Lord God interposed by his secret and powerful agency upon their minds, the whole plan of redemption would be entirely frustrated, and all the human race would perish. Jehovah therefore is engaged by promise, for the securing of his own glory, to render the obedience and the sacrifice of Christ efficacious to the salvation of an innumerable multitude, by inclining their hearts to make the necessary application to him. This is the word of the covenant, "The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies. Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power*." In every place then, and in every instance, where the gospel succeeds, we acknowledge that "the hand of the Lord" produces the effect. "It is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth†." He performs the wondrous work; He bestows the gift. In this statement of the subject the following things are implied:

1. God alone removes the hindrances and ob-

* Psalm cx. 2, 3.

† Rom. i. 16.

jections, which prevent any persons from believing. Men's ignorance keeps them from Christ, and till that veil be taken away, which can be done only by the divine agency, they will never admire, trust, and serve Him. "The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.—But God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*." There is in the human mind a natural listlessness and indifference about its spiritual concerns, which can never consist with a real regard to Christ; and it is the Lord alone, who awakens the careless sinner, and excites in him serious thoughts and desires. Thus "Lydia's heart was opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul†." Yet, however the attention may be roused, there are various carnal affections, which predominate in unbelievers and set them against Christ, such as pride, worldliness, sensuality; and these are to be subdued by no less a power than that of the Holy Ghost. Added to all these, there is also in the human heart a secret dishonesty towards God. Even with professions of strong regard, men deny the just claims which

* 2 Cor. iv. 4, 6.

† Acts xvi. 14.

He has upon them, and refuse him the honour due unto his name: on which account they make light of Christ, and treat with disdain the offers of redemption as a needless thing. The Lord alone can effectually convince them of his right to their constant and unreserved obedience. This being accomplished, their immediate and importunate enquiry is, “What must I do to be saved?” and the principal impediment to a serious examination, if not to a cordial reception, of the gospel is taken away. Yet this is not all.

2. He disposes the awakened penitent to embrace the offers of mercy through Jesus Christ, and to submit to him on his own terms. The appointed method of redemption, by the blood of the cross, is such as will not commend itself to our approbation, till our self-conceit and stoutness of heart be brought down. And who but God shall abase the haughtiness of man? Elated with ideas of our natural strength and sufficiency, we are unwilling to be indebted to the righteousness of another, and to be saved by grace alone. We dislike the very proposal, and fight against it; nor do we at last submit, but as it were of necessity. Not unfrequently there is a difficulty of a contrary sort to be removed. Persons, who are deeply sensible of their condition, are prone to despond, as if there could be no forgiveness for their numerous and aggravated sins, and as if such inveterate depravity as their’s

could never be subdued. No arguments or persuasions will dissipate their fears, or even encourage them to try the effect of an application to Christ, till the Holy Spirit, whose office it is to glorify Him *, inspires them with hope and confidence, by representing the power and suitableness, the righteousness and grace of this Redeemer. “No man can come unto Him, except it were given unto Him of the Father †.” Then all objections are silenced; the way of mercy, revealed in the gospel, is acceded to; it is approved, admired, delighted in. The change is most astonishing: it is no less than the mighty work of God.

3. He also gives support and increasing vigour to that principle of faith, which he produces in the heart. Many difficulties oppose the progress of the Christian, so that he must fight manfully in order to maintain his dependence on Christ. He perseveres, he hopes to the end; but he does so only by virtue of divine assistance. He triumphs over all; he is “more than conqueror,” but this he devoutly ascribes to “Him that loved him ‡.” He feels therefore the necessity, not only of watchfulness and courage, but of prayer, that he may “stand fast in the Lord,” and “grow in grace.” His continual cry will be, “Increase my faith: Lord, I believe, help thou mine un-

* John xvi. 14.

† John vi. 65.

‡ Rom. viii. 37.

belief! Fulfil in me all the good pleasure of thy goodness and the work of faith with power*." Thus it will appear through the whole process, that faith, not only in its origin, but in every succeeding stage of advancement, is "not of ourselves: it is the gift of God." He, who is "the author," is also "the finisher †."

Against this representation many objections are urged. It is supposed to be absurd, inconsistent, and dangerous: and we are required to answer such questions as the following.

1. If all depends upon the operation of God, may not we remain inactive? Why need we bestir ourselves? Should we not wait in quietness, till He be pleased to work? No: this would be a perversion and an abuse of the doctrine. There are means, which he hath appointed to be used for the attainment of the end; and therefore it would be no less criminal to neglect those means, than it would be to depend upon them alone without the Lord. "Faith cometh by hearing ‡;" and, as the preaching of his word is one principal instrument which he employs to bring men "to the obedience of faith," that ordinance should be revered and diligently attended; yet at the same time fervent prayer should be offered up to Him, who alone can

* Luke xvii. 5. Mark ix. 24. 2 Thess. i. 11.

† Heb. xii. 2.

‡ Rom. x. 17.

render it effectual. “Who is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man * ?” By these principles, then, we may be roused to action, and our application to God encouraged, while our vain presumption is checked, and we are made to feel our insignificance and dependence.

2. Where can be the use or propriety of exhortations to faith? We reply, that men may surely be called upon to practise that, which is their bounden duty, however indisposed they may be to it: and it will not be denied that they are under the strongest obligations to receive the testimony of God. Their unwillingness, for that is properly their inability, to do so, will not excuse or palliate their unbelief. God alone can remove their disinclination to credit him, but He is pleased to work upon them in a way suited to their rational faculties, by arguments and exhortations addressed to their understandings and affections. This, we have frequent occasion to remark, is his general and appointed method for reducing them to a proper state of mind, just as the labour of the husbandman is for bringing forth the fruits of the earth: and no one, we presume, will object to the culture of his ground, though it is “God that giveth the increase †.”—
But

* 1 Cor. iii. 5.

† 1 Cor. iii. 7.

3. Does not this account of faith take away its morality? No: it is indeed "the gift of God," and yet it is on our part voluntary, and no less our own, than any other act, temper, or principle, wrought in us by his grace. Why may it not, then, be the subject of commendation, as much as any holy disposition we receive from him? The want of it will justly expose us to his displeasure, as we shall prove in a subsequent essay. For, though it may be urged with some plausibility, that no blame can attach to us, where we have no power to do otherwise; yet the real case is, that we CANNOT believe merely through our own wickedness, or in other words that we WILL NOT. In like manner ignorant and careless sinners cannot pray, cannot love God, or perform any spiritual service: but no one will say, that for this reason it is inconsistent with equity to punish them.

If we possess this precious gift of God, we ought to be apprized of our obligations. How much do we owe to him for his distinguished mercy! Let his name be magnified; but let us not foolishly arrogate any praise to ourselves. "If thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it*?" Nay, though we are weak in faith, the smallest measure of it, being of divine origin, demands our liveliest gra-

* 1 Cor. iv. 7.

titute, and should encourage our hope, that it will be gradually increased, and ensure to us all the blessings of salvation. But let unbelievers declare honestly, what is it which prevents their reception of the gospel. Will they complain of their inability, and say that they are properly disposed and earnestly desire to attain the necessary faith, but are restrained by some external and forcible hindrance? This would be the extreme of self-deception. Let them fairly examine the state of their own minds, and it will not be difficult for them to discover, whether they will confess it or no, that their want of faith springs from a disregard and contempt of God, and therefore that it ought to excite their fears, and cover them with shame and confusion.

ESSAY L.

ON THE NECESSITY OF FAITH.

Men are much influenced by fear,—should consider the necessity of faith,—and the dangerous state of unbelievers,—who treat God's authority with contempt,—deny all his testimonies concerning Christ,—reject his proffered mercy in the gospel,—are destitute of the right principle of obedience,—possess not in themselves any moral ability to do good,—and can assign no cause for their infidelity, but what will condemn them.

HOPE and fear are the two principal springs of human action: perhaps the latter is the most forcible. The dread of suffering seems to have greater influence than the prospect of happiness. We may derive advantage from both these motives in religion: each of them should stimulate us to seek for “the faith of the gospel.” We have considered the benefits resulting from it, and especially its tendency to secure our present peace as well as final salvation. Has this representation produced its proper effect? Or are

we still indifferent about believing? Shall we be content to relinquish all the rich blessings proposed? This would be the most deplorable folly. But we must now consider the subject upon different grounds. "Faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ" is not only beneficial, but indispensably requisite: it is so essentially connected with salvation, that without it we must feel the indignation of an offended God. To remain willingly destitute of it, is to chuse, or rather obstinately to rush into, everlasting damnation. We are assured, that "without faith it is impossible to please God*." And is it of no consequence, whether we be finally accepted or rejected of Him? His favour is life: His anger must produce the consummation of misery; and to the fierceness of that anger, with all its tremendous effects, the unbeliever will be for ever exposed.

This position is equally true, whether we take Faith in a large sense as being an unfeigned assent to the testimony of God in general, or give it a more limited meaning as a crediting of his testimony concerning Jesus Christ in particular. The former indeed must lead to the latter. He, who sincerely believes the scriptures to be the word of God, must truly regard and depend upon Christ: and therefore we do not hesitate to assert,

* Heb. xi, 6.

that without an unfeigned and cordial reliance upon Him “IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO PLEASE GOD.” May this thought be deeply impressed upon our hearts, excite in us a holy jealousy over ourselves, and constrain us to pray for that grace, on which our salvation depends!

The doctrine is offensive, and in the vindication of it we shall strike against the prejudices of many, especially of those who entrench themselves within their moral duties, and, presuming that nothing more can be necessary, are confident of their own security. We speak not in derogation of PERFECT MORALITY; for such a righteousness would ensure life to its possessors; but of that very partial system of human virtue, which the world generally understand by that term, and which regards external acts more than principles. Nor would we utter one syllable in disparagement of any good habit or practice, though defective. Let honesty, temperance, and kindness, have all due praise and estimation in society; but let them not be supposed to comprise the whole of what God requires, or to constitute a title to His favour. Upon the christian plan we must maintain, that whatever morality men may now be able to plead, in their present fallen and depraved state, they must be objects of the divine displeasure, without faith in Christ, and so dying must perish for ever.

How numerous and how express are the decla-

rations of the sacred oracles, which confirm this position! Let us attend to the following, among many others which speak the same language. “He that believeth not, shall be damned.—He that believeth not, is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God.—He that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.—If ye believe not that I am He, said Christ, ye shall die in your sins.—He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.—That they all might be damned, who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.—How then shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation *?”—All these passages prove, not only that unbelievers will assuredly perish, but that they will perish **BECAUSE OF UNBELIEF**: it is the sin, which will constitute the ground of their condemnation, and which will aggravate their punishment. Is this wondered at, or the justice of it questioned? Do you vindicate your contemptuous disregard of the Saviour, or maintain that it is a trifling and a venial offence? We wish to impress you with a conviction, that unbelief is no other than malignity of heart against

* Mark xvi. 16. John iii. 18, 36. viii. 24. xii. 48.

2 Thess. ii. 12. Heb. ii. 3.

God and his Christ. What immorality can be worse than this, or can equal it in atrocity? For

1. You despise and resist the authority of the eternal and almighty Sovereign. The gospel is "a law," a command issued from the mouth of Jehovah, and as such it requires your unqualified obedience. It comes to you with a "Thus saith the Lord;" and faith in Jesus Christ is the appropriate duty, which it enjoins and enforces with the most tremendous sanctions. To those, who ask, "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" it replies, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him, whom He hath sent*." It is the work; to which He calls you more than to any other, or rather, in order to every other acceptable service. "This is His commandment, that ye should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ†." Is this commandment then to be superseded, or violated with impunity, any more than the several precepts in the decalogue? He that said, "Thou shalt not kill," and "Thou shalt not commit adultery," hath in language equally strong and explicit required you to "honour the Son," by giving Him your unreserved confidence and subjection. You are not therefore at liberty to make light of this injunction, as if it were a matter of perfect indifference: for by your disregard of Christ you

* John vi. 28, 29.

† 1 John iii. 23.

are marked as a transgressor, and a rebel against the divine Lawgiver, as much as the murderer and the adulterer. Does this excite no serious apprehensions of danger?

2. You deny all the testimonies of the Father concerning his Son Jesus Christ. In the holy scriptures you are to consider the faithful and true God as addressing you: and in his declarations as he cannot himself be mistaken, so neither can he mean to impose upon you. But the chief purport and substance of this revelation is redemption by Christ, his character and work, his offices and benefits. He is “the alpha and omega, the beginning and the ending.” This then is “the faithful saying, which is worthy of all acceptance, That Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners:—And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life; and this life is in his Son*.” But if Christ be not precious to you, if you “see no beauty in him, that you should desire him,” whence is this, we ask, but from a presumption that the word of God is not worthy of supreme regard? Your actions at least bespeak a suspicion of his veracity. You treat him as if he were a liar, and as if his word might be disproved. Is this a small offence in your scale of moral duties? Can there be a greater insult to Him, who is jealous of his

* 1 Tim. i. 15. 1 John v. 11.

honour? And will he not resent it? He will vindicate his own character, and constrain you to acknowledge the truth of all his testimonies concerning his beloved Son: for “at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*.” What then will be the consternation, the horror, and despair, of every unbeliever!

3. You reject his proffered mercy in the gospel. Man as a sinner is in a state of guilt, misery, and ruin, from which he can obtain no deliverance but by Jesus Christ. In Him a suitable and an adequate remedy is provided; and it is freely proposed to all. But only by faith can any receive and participate the blessing. If then you refuse to comply with the terms prescribed, you declare your hostility to the gracious plan, you pour contempt upon the salvation itself, and virtually “put it from you.” Is this a proper return to Him, who “took upon him to deliver man,” and interposed with his own precious blood to “make reconciliation for iniquity?” Do you so compensate his love, his obedience, and his death? Do you so make light of the rich benefits, which He gratuitously offers to you, of all his invitations and promises? He complains of your perverse and scornful rejection of

* Phil. ii. 10, 11:

Him: "I have called, and ye refused:—How often would I have gathered you, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not:—Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life*." This is a species of ingratitude not to be paralleled for its baseness. It involves in it the most complicated guilt: it is a contempt of the highest excellence, of the tenderest compassion, and of the most beneficent kindness. Shall such a scornful treatment of the ever-blessed Redeemer pass with impunity? Will not the Father avenge the insult put upon his beloved Son? Or shall you complain hereafter, that the mercy is withheld from you, which you were not willing to accept? or that you are shut out of heaven, when you would not enter the kingdom by the only possible way of admission?

4. You must be destitute of the right principle of obedience. The faith of Christ is necessary for the performance of good works, as well as for your justification before God. He hath commanded all your duties to be done, and all your services to be offered up to him, in the name and through the mediation of our great High Priest, who alone can present them with acceptance to the Father. "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him†." For

* Prov. i. 24. Matt. xxiii. 37. John v. 40.

† Col. iii. 17.

believers are “an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ*.” Where Christ is disregarded, where his blood and righteousness are not pleaded and depended on, whatever costly oblations are presented, they will be rejected as defiled and abominable; the purity of the divine Majesty cannot receive them. It is as if ye “offered the blind, the lame, and the sick, for sacrifice:—should I accept this of your hands, saith the Lord †?” Presume no longer upon your specious and much-admired morality. Bring all your boasted duties to the test: are they wrought in faith, “as God hath willed and commanded?” The want of this principle, if there were no other failure, is a decisive mark against you: it renders all your attainments and performances offensive to God, as being an attempt to supersede the righteousness of his Son; and it proves you to be in a state of enmity against Him. Is it possible that this can be a state of security?

5. You possess not in yourselves any moral ability to do good. Such is the condition of fallen man, that he is by nature weak and depraved. He has no strength or inclination to perform any spiritual service; but in the pursuit of evil he discovers vigour and delight. Now, it is by the Redeemer alone this malady of the

* 1 Peter ii. 5.

† Mal. i. 8, 13.

soul can be removed, and its health and energy restored. Through faith we receive from Him the quickening, animating power of his grace: thus only we are ingrafted into the true Vine, and become living branches, bearing the fruits of righteousness. "For without Me," said he, "ye can do nothing*." "Of his only gift it cometh, that his FAITHFUL people do unto him true and laudable service†." Will not this consideration convince you of the danger of unbelief? On your own plan of procuring the divine favour by your obedience, you are cut off from all hope: for your best obedience is polluted; it springs from a corrupt source; it is devoid of spiritual principles, holy fear and love; it is not the obedience of the heart, and cannot be pleasing to God. How fatally do you deceive yourselves! You are attempting to raise a superstructure without laying a firm foundation: your towering expectations will fall. You presume on your own goodness, as if you possessed a large stock of merit, when in fact you remain in a state of moral defilement: the very works of which you boast "have the nature of sin‡," and the tremendous sentence of condemnation, pronounced by the law, is in full force against you. Is this a state to be continued in?

* John xv. 5.

† Collect for 13th Sunday after Trinity.

‡ Article xiii.

6. You can assign no just cause for your unbelief. You complain, perhaps, of the want of evidence; though such evidence is given you, as abundantly satisfies you upon other subjects, the clear testimony of numerous and unexceptionable witnesses. You may indeed be calling for proofs, which you have no right to expect, and which it has pleased God to withhold. So did the Jews, who demanded of our Lord “a sign from heaven:” so did Thomas, who refused to believe his Master’s resurrection, “except he should see in his hands the print of the nails, and put his finger into the print of the nails, and thrust his hand into his side *.” This is a sure mark of a presumptuous mind. You may allege, that you are unwilling to be credulous, and yet in rejecting revelation you betray the extreme of credulity. You suppose, that plain, artless, and unlearned men invented a scheme more sublime and wonderful than any other that ever entered the human imagination; that they propagated a known falsehood in opposition to every motive, which could influence the breast of an impostor, sacrificing every comfort in life, and even life itself, in attestation of their doctrine; that the God of truth has lent his support in confirmation of a lie, by the working of miracles, by the completion of prophecies, by the propagation of the gospel through means perfectly inadequate.

* Matt. xvi. 1. John xx. 25.

These are difficulties you are constrained to admit, and they are far greater than those which attend the belief of revelation.

Talk not then of the credulity of Christians; but examine more minutely by what principles you yourselves are influenced. The fact is, you dislike the whole system of Christianity, the humiliation of heart, the self-denial, and the purity, which it requires: you object to it through pride, through the love of the world, through sensuality. Can you not trace up your opposition to some such source? And is this what you can justify? Would you be unbelievers, if Christ would allow you to be vain and dissipated, to pursue your plans of "living after the flesh," or to retain at least "the sin which doth so easily beset you?" Or can you assign a reason for your rejection of Him, which would not betray an unsoundness of heart? This therefore would leave you without excuse, and expose you to condemnation.

There are those, who plead their inability, as before intimated, and who say, "We would believe, if we could: but faith is the gift of God, and as it is not in our own power, we cannot justly be condemned or blamed for the want of it." This is an unfair representation: it seems to insinuate, that you are extremely desirous of believing, and are prevented only by some powerful restraint. But does the Lord impose any such hindrance upon you? Far otherwise. He calls

you to the duty, and suggests every encouragement to its performance. He invites you to a participation of the blessings of redemption, assuring you that all things on His part are ready, and promising you the gracious assistance of his Spirit. He expostulates with you on the perverseness of your refusal: He warns you of its danger: He threatens you with punishment for your disobedience. He declares that the guilt is your own, and that "now you have no cloak for your sin*." We repeat it, every holy temper and principle, as well as faith, is His gift: but the want of them is chargeable upon you. Purity of heart, love to God, kindness, meekness, gentleness, and peace, are not within the compass of your own ability, for they are the fruits of the Spirit; but, if destitute of them, you will indubitably and most justly be condemned at the tribunal of Christ.

What has been here advanced of the indispensable necessity of faith, will apply only to those, to whom the message of the gospel is addressed, and who are capable of understanding it. We say nothing of children dying in their infancy, except it be to encourage hope. We decide not upon the case of heathens, who must be left to the uncovenanted mercies of God, suggesting only that if saved they must owe their salvation to the mediation of Jesus Christ; "for there is none other name whereby men must be saved†." But our

* John xv. 22.

† Acts iv. 12. Article xviii.

present address is to those, among whom the light of the gospel shines, with fulness of evidence, and in purity of doctrine. Such is the privilege of the inhabitants of this favoured country. O that you “knew the time of your visitation!” The Lord is waiting upon you with calls and invitations, with importunate entreaties, with numerous means of instruction, by many witnesses of his truth, both ministers and private Christians, who commend unto you the word of his grace. Will you still reject his counsel? O think yet again: and “take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God! To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts*!” These are not matters of curious or trifling speculation. The consequences are inconceivably momentous. “He that believeth shall not be confounded:” but they “who stumble at the word, being disobedient,” shall be destroyed: “the stone, which they reject, shall fall upon them, and grind them to powder†.”

* Heb. iii. 7—12.

† 1 Peter ii. 6—8. Matt. xxi. 42, 44.

ESSAY LI.

ON THE NATURE OF SANCTIFICATION.

PART I.

Sanctification is connected with Faith,—implies more than external dedication,—is a gradual purifying of the soul,—more than moral virtue,—or than an external conformity to the law,—better than the most splendid gifts.—The sanctification of Christians, was the end of the divine counsels,—and one part of the design of Christ's sacrifice,—is the great object of the Spirit's operation,—the chief excellence and glory of the redeemed,—the principal thing which God requires, and they should aim at.—How it differs from Justification.

THE design of these essays is to exhibit the grand outlines of the christian system ; to give, in their order and connection, a clear representation of the doctrines revealed, and of the duties prescribed. It is desirable, that our readers may not only be impressed with some things of peculiar magnitude and importance, but take a comprehensive view, and admire the consistency and

excellence of the whole together. They should therefore be cautioned not to be precipitate in their decisions, not hastily to receive an objection or a prejudice in their minds, much less to condemn and reject any detached parts, till they have considered the plan throughout. Possibly they may afterwards discover, that their dislike and opposition originated in their own rash judgment, that they have been mistaken, and that a more enlarged and deliberate survey of the subject would have prevented their erroneous conclusions.

From the doctrines already discussed some may be inclined to ask, “Why is so much stress laid upon faith? Why should you not rather inculcate the duties of honesty, temperance, and benevolence? For after all, is not practice the main point, and the very end of all religion?” We reply, that those have formed their opinion only from a part of our system, who censure it as subversive of morality, or as ill calculated to promote good works. The faith, on which we insist, will most effectually secure an uniform regard to those duties, for which some are so zealous, as if the whole of Christianity were comprised in them. But it will do more: it is essentially connected with SANCTIFICATION; and it will soon appear, that this is of a more excellent nature, and far more extensive, than moral virtue. It ought not surely to be objected, that we are

unfriendly to holiness and to practical religion, when we maintain that every believer is and must be sanctified. This, which constitutes a necessary and a prominent part of Christian Theology, will contain a sufficient refutation of such idle cavils, and a further proof of the suitableness and abundance of that provision, which the gospel reveals and proposes for the relief of man's misery, and for his entire recovery to God. But without sanctification, notwithstanding every other gift and effect of divine mercy, he will remain a fallen, a wretched, and a ruined creature, because unholy. How great is that grace, by which he is rescued, not from punishment alone, but from the defilement, the dominion, and the love of sin! Such therefore would be our address to real Christians: "We are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, THROUGH SANCTIFICATION OF THE SPIRIT and belief of the truth *."

It may be sufficient for the present

I. To explain the term. We fear that its meaning is sometimes lowered, and its peculiar nature and excellence entirely lost sight of. It is however granted, that it frequently signifies an external dedication to God and to holy

purposes ;—a separation from common uses, and an appropriation to the service of religion. Thus inanimate things, days and places, the garments of priests, the temple, and even its common furniture, were said to be “ sanctified ;” that is, they were devoted to God, and considered as His property, to be employed in His worship, and according to His appointment. It is applied also to persons, set apart and admitted to any sacred office : and thus even Christ himself was “ sanctified,” when by a solemn investiture he entered on his sacerdotal function *. Children also, who are capable of being received by baptism as members of the outward church, are called “ holy ;” and the very food provided for the sustenance of our bodies is said to be “ sanctified,” when we receive it with prayer to God, that we may be strengthened for his service and glory †.

But the sanctification, of which we treat, and which we consider as one of the highest privileges of Christians, is internal: it is the communication of holy principles to “ the inner man :” it is the renovation of the soul “ after the image of God” by a gradual and continued process to the end of life. It is begun in regeneration ; and it is the carrying on, the support, and the progress of that vital principle, which is first

* John xvii. 19. Heb. x. 29.

† 1 Cor. vii. 14. 1 Tim. iv. 5.

produced in the new birth. Its necessity arises from man's depravity,—from the corruptions remaining in his nature, even when regenerate. “The old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, must be put off: we must be renewed in the spirit of our mind, and put on the new man;” in order that we may serve God “in righteousness and true holiness*.” And forasmuch as “the flesh lusteth against the Spirit,” even in believers, “so that they cannot do the things that they would†;” we must DAILY be renewed by the Holy Ghost, whose mighty influence alone, exerted upon all the faculties of the soul, can maintain, invigorate, and perfect, that divine life, which He has implanted. This surely is an internal operation, and it is always so described.

St. Paul speaks of it as “a work,”—“a good work,”—wrought “in us,”—“which He, who hath begun, will perform until the day of Jesus Christ‡.” Thus also he addresses the formal and hypocritical Jews, to convince them that true religion is an internal and spiritual principle: “He is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men,

* Eph. iv. 22—24.

† Gal. v. 17.

‡ Phil. i. 6.

but of God *.” And is it not equally and indispensably necessary, that the disciples of Christ should possess this purification of the heart, as well as an orthodox system of doctrine? Accordingly the same apostle represents himself, with all his imperfections, as a partaker of that new and living principle, maintained by “the Spirit lusting against the flesh,”—“I delight in the law of God after the inward man;” and he declares, “Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day †.” What was this renovation, but the very work of which we speak?—St. Peter likewise gives the same view of genuine and vital godliness, “which is in the sight of God of great price,” when he calls it “the hidden man of the heart ‡.” And St. John describes the efficacy of this principle, which God alone by his powerful agency maintains in the souls of his people, as the only sure preservative from apostasy;—“Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God §.”

From these and various other scriptures it is manifest, that real Christians are not merely dedicated to God by profession, or distinguished from others by an external badge or by religious

* Rom. ii. 28, 29.

† Rom. vii. 22. 2 Cor. iv. 16.

‡ 1 Peter iii. 4.

§ 1 John iii. 9.

ceremonies, but are possessed of an internal excellency, the enlivening, purifying grace of “the Spirit of holiness,” by which they are “made to differ,” as “a peculiar people.” This should appear in them by a growing hatred of sin and deliverance from its power, by the vigorous exercise and increase of all holy affections. Thus the various parts of the christian character are exhibited, improved, and perfected; “the fruits of righteousness” are brought forth and matured; humility, fear, love, zeal, gentleness, temperance, purity, and heavenly-mindedness, are preserved and nurtured, till they are advanced to a state of completeness. This is “Sanctification.”

How exalted is the privilege! How high the attainment! It is far more than the lax system of moral virtue, which is all that many contend for;—more than can ever be acquired by the cultivation of reason, or the most strenuous efforts of unassisted nature, or mere human ability. We know how deplorably these have failed, in the regulation even of the outward conduct: and to the purification of the heart they make no pretences. It is of importance to society, that men be decent and regular in their deportment, and that their actions be directed by the precepts of the divine law: but this, however valuable, falls short of sanctification, which governs the tempers and principles, and produces holy practices from holy affections. The grace of God may be

imparted to many for the restraining of their corrupt passions; and thus they may be rendered gentle in their manners, who would otherwise excite the most horrible disorder and confusion: but the grace, which sanctifies, does more than repress depraved dispositions; in their stead it implants and cherishes those which are truly excellent. Some have been placed in eminent stations and the chief offices of the church, and invested with splendid gifts, by the zealous exercise of which they have been admired as eminent saints, and have conducted others to the knowledge and belief of real religion; whilst they themselves have remained proud, and covetous, lustful, and vindictive, that is, unsanctified, and therefore destitute of “the best gifts.” For the grace, of which we speak, is totally distinct from, and far superior to, all intellectual endowments, the most enlarged usefulness in life, and even the miraculous powers of the Holy Ghost. It is better than “the tongues of men and angels;” better than “the gift of prophecy, the understanding of all mysteries, and all knowledge;” better than “the faith, which could remove mountains;” the liberality, which might “give all its goods to feed the poor;” or even the zeal of the martyr, by which he might “give his body to be burned*.” It is “a new creation,”—“a

* 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3.

new man,”—“ a new heart,”—“ a right spirit,”—a conformity to the mind and image of Christ.

That we may fix the attention of the reader more closely to this point, we proceed in a brief manner

II. To state the importance of the subject. Is it sufficiently considered and insisted on? Is it regarded, as replete with advantages, as indispensably requisite, and productive of the strongest and most exalted consolations? Is it understood, not only to form a necessary part of the christian system, but also to be essentially connected with every other part, so that the whole must fall without it?

The sanctification of believers, whence all their holiness is derived, was the end of the divine counsels in redemption. Our minds are impressed with reverential awe, whilst our thoughts are carried back to the original source of all their spiritual blessings,—the everlasting love of God towards them in Jesus Christ. This love is free, and unmerited: it was not fixed upon them from a respect to that purity and excellence, which it was foreseen they would possess; but rather, it determined upon the means, by which they should in due season be brought to that state. However deep and mysterious this matter be, yet such is the order of things, as described in the sacred oracles. “ Whom He did predestinate, them He also called:—According as He hath

chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world, THAT WE SHOULD BE HOLY, and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will*.” Nothing therefore can be more preposterous, than for persons to presume upon their election, who give no diligence “to make their calling sure,” or to boast of their calling, while negligent of good works and destitute of internal purity. But let these doctrines be properly arranged, and sanctification will be allowed to have a close and necessary connection with God’s sovereign and righteous purposes of bringing his people to everlasting glory.

It was one part of the design of Christ’s propitiatory sacrifice. We say not how many important objects were intended to be answered by his death, but it was surely not the least considerable to obtain grace for all who should believe in him, to rescue them from the dominion and the love of sin, to cleanse them from its defilement, and to subdue them to a state of holy obedience and cheerful subjection to himself. Such is the account of his apostle;—“He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works:—wherefore, that he

* Rom. viii. 30. Eph. i. 4, 5.

might sanctify the people with his own blood, he suffered without the gate *.” Such also is his own declaration;—“For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.—Lo, I come to do thy will, O God:—by the which will we are sanctified, through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all †.” The graces of the Holy Spirit are imparted to us only in consequence of this oblation: and therefore after the Saviour had been “delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification,” “when he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men; yea, to the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them ‡.” Shall we then contend for the atonement, and shew no desire that it may produce its intended efficacy upon our minds, in “purging our conscience from dead works, that we may serve the living God §?” Shall we derive hope and consolation from the cross, and not learn from it to abominate sin, and to seek for that influence by which alone we can be renewed in holiness? And, without holiness, how will it appear that we are partakers of redemption?

It is the great object, for which the Spirit's influence is exerted in the minds of believers.

* Titus ii. 14. Heb. xiii. 12.

† John xvii. 19. Heb. x. 9, 10.

‡ Rom. iv. 25. Eph. iv. 8. Psalm lxviii. 18. § Heb. ix. 14.

His operations are various; He communicates to them in different degrees light, and strength, and comfort; but whatever is in them of real excellency “He worketh all in all*.” By Him they are guided into all truth, and cheered with the hope of their adoption: but his chief work, and that to which the other parts of his office are subservient, is the gradual transformation of their souls into the divine image. Thus they “are changed from glory to glory,” from one degree of grace to another; they “mortify the deeds of the body,” and produce that fruit, which is “in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth†.” “The sanctification of the Spirit,” as if the term comprised the whole of his influence, is that, through which “the elect of God” are conducted “unto obedience” here, and hereafter “to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ‡.” Should this therefore be lightly esteemed, by any of those especially who profess to have received “the Spirit of wisdom,” and to “abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost?” How forcible and how pertinent is the exhortation, “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit§!” There is no other way of manifesting the divine life in our souls, produced by his agency, than by our continued progress and

* 1 Cor. xii. 6.

† 2 Cor. iii. 18. Rom. viii. 13. Eph. v. 9.

‡ 2 Thess. ii. 13, 14. 1 Peter i. 2. § Gal. v. 25.

steadfast perseverance in holiness even to the end.

It is the chief excellence and glory of the redeemed of the Lord. Much is done for them in various ways, and very exalted are their privileges. But all is little, compared to this, that they are “conformed to the image of Christ.” They are “called to be saints*,” that is, to be sanctified or made holy persons: it is the end, for which they are brought to the knowledge of Christ; and it is the highest honour, which He bestows upon them. This is the peculiar distinction, which the Psalmist celebrates as adorning the spouse of the heavenly Bridegroom, “The King’s daughter is all glorious WITHIN†.” And it is the same spiritual beauty, which when perfected will shine with so much splendour in the bright world above, and excite the admiration of men and angels: for He will “present to himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing,—holy, and unblameable, and unreprouceable, in His sight‡.” “Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father,” and praises shall for ever ascend unto Him, “who hath made them meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light§.” Should not this work engage

* Rom. i. 7.

† Psalm xlv. 13.

‡ Eph. v. 27. Col. i. 22.

§ Matt. xiii. 43. Col. i. 12.

our highest estimation? Let us admire whatever fruits or evidences of it we perceive in others, and hope and long and pray for its completion in ourselves.

It is the principal thing, which the Lord God requires in his people, and which they should most earnestly desire and pursue. What is it, which He most peremptorily commands? or what is the purport and the sum of all his precepts? Is it not this, “Be ye holy, for I am holy*?” Here then we learn what is his mind concerning us: and an apostle further assures us, “This is the will of God, even your sanctification†.” Shall we resist his will; or attempt to defeat his counsels? Shall we pay no regard to all his wise and gracious injunctions? Rather, let this be the object of all our studies and exertions, that “as He, who hath called us, is holy, so we may be holy in all manner of conversation‡.” Let it not be complained of as a grievance, but desired as a privilege. Why is there even among Christians so general an inattention and aversion to it? Surely, we are wretched triflers, if we are not most seriously aiming at the sanctification of our souls. O let us listen to the word of exhortation: “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof: neither yield

* 1 Peter i. 16.

† 1 Thess. iv. 3.

‡ 1 Peter i. 15.

ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin; but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.—Follow holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord *.”

From this view of the subject it appears, that Sanctification ought not to be confounded with Justification. It is not the same thing, but perfectly distinct, and an additional blessing in the great scheme of man's salvation. They are mentioned in the very same passages as two different points; to each of which the proper place and importance should be assigned in our system. “Of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us,—**RIGHTEOUSNESS**, and **SANCTIFICATION**.”—“Ye are **SANCTIFIED**, ye are **JUSTIFIED**, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God †.” The believer possesses both: but they differ essentially in their nature: the one being an alteration of his state, the other of his character. By Justification he is delivered from the condemning sentence of the law, and is accounted righteous as if he had fulfilled it; by Sanctification the corrupt affections of his heart are subdued, and holy principles are implanted. They are to be ascribed also to separate causes; the former to the imputation of

* Rom. vi. 12, 13. Heb. xii. 14.

† 1 Cor. i. 30. vi. 11.

Christ's obedience, the latter to the continued communications of the Spirit's influence. The former is perfect, immediately upon believing, and cannot receive any addition even in heaven: the latter is defective in the most eminent saint upon earth, as to its present degree and measure; but it is progressive, just as the growth of children, the increase and ripening of the corn, and the gradual augmentation of the morning light, "that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." In due season, however, this shall attain the same absolute completeness as the other; and both together shall constitute the consummation of the Christian's felicity in the heavenly world.

Let us enquire then, so far as we have gone into the explanation, Have we understood the important subject? Have we experienced any thing of this purification of the soul? Is the work begun? Is it in a state of advancement? To persons of the world the very terms are unintelligible; and they turn away from the investigation with disgust. But we fear that many also, who are accounted Christians, remain in extreme ignorance of this point, which forms so essential a part of their religious system; and they discover no solicitude to become acquainted with it. It is undeniable at least, that thousands among us are unholy: they are yet carnal. Are they aware of their condition? We wish to alarm their consciences by a representation of their case. They

“ cannot please God,” and are destitute of peace and hope. “ To be carnally-minded is death:” the soul is sunk into a torpid state, incapable of serving or enjoying God; and unless revived and animated by the energy of almighty grace, it will soon be for ever separated from him. “ For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die *.”

* Rom. viii. 6, 8, 13.

ESSAY LII.

ON THE NATURE OF SANCTIFICATION.

PART II.

It may be proper to consider the extensive nature of sanctification, as reaching to the whole man,—the body and the soul, in all their members and faculties,—and its peculiar effects, according to the objects presented.—These may be investigated with respect to sin,—to duty,—to God,—to Christ,—and to the Holy Spirit.

CHRISTIANS are recovered from the ruins of the fall, chiefly as being SANCTIFIED; and from this circumstance they are generally in the new testament denominated SAINTS. They are restored in a measure to what Adam lost, to that excellency, which formed his principal glory in paradise, the image of God “in righteousness and true holiness.” This is a wonderful work: it “renews the face of the earth,” brings back to man his forfeited happiness, and displays, more than his original creation did, the perfections of

Jehovah. Redemption would be defective without it; nay, though other purposes were intended, redemption was undertaken with a view to the accomplishment of this work. While we contemplate and admire the process, let us devoutly pray, that we may experience it in all its efficacy and in all its blessedness!

The subject has been opened, and its importance shewn. We now resume it, that we may give it a fuller consideration; for we have done little more than explain the term. "Sanctification," we have seen, is a divine operation, implanting and maintaining in the souls of believers a vigorous principle, which will regulate the heart, as well as the life, according to the will of God. Hereby, then, all evil tempers and practices will be abhorred and renounced, and a system of holy obedience will be adopted and pursued. We shall better understand it by enlarging our enquiries, and endeavouring to investigate

I. Its extensive nature. We fear that many take up with erroneous and partial views of it, are satisfied with some fair semblance, or with its commencement, and wish not for its progress and completion. Our opinion should be formed, not from a detached text, but from a collection of the accounts given of it in all the scriptures: and from such a comparison we conclude, that, though every believer be defective in every grace,

this work possesses in each one of them a perfection of parts, and is no less than a restoration of the whole man. Such is the inference we draw from the apostle's intercession for the Thessalonians: "The very God of peace SANCTIFY YOU WHOLLY: and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body, be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ *."

Its influence will extend to the body. Though that be not its immediate seat, yet, as the state of the mind is manifested by the proper subordination and exertions of the body, much stress is laid upon this consideration. The deportment of "the outward man" should prove that "the inward man is renewed." The one as well as the other is created for the service of God, is redeemed by the blood of Christ, and is consecrated by the Spirit. "I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.—The body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body.—What, know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's †."

* 1 Thess. v. 23.

† Rom. xii. 1. 1 Cor. vi. 13, 19, 20.

This consideration should render even our "earthly tabernacles" highly honourable in our estimation. We should reverence them, not so much for their curious mechanism, their strength, or their beauty, as for the property which the Lord himself claims in them, the regard which he pays to them, and the services to which he appoints them. We should value them for his sake, and beware of alienating them from his possession. By examining to what purposes they are devoted, and how they are chiefly occupied, we may ascertain the reality and the measure of our sanctification. Do we so use them, as those who have surrendered their whole selves to God, and whose desire is to live only to His praise? Are we vigorous in our exertions to promote His cause in the world? Are we firm in resisting inordinate desires of indulgence? Do we govern our appetites, or are we enslaved by them?

Such is the evidence we are required to give of our purity: "Let not sin reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof: neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin; but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God*." But are not our eyes allowed to wander after vanity, and to be fixed on such

* Rom. vi. 12, 13.

scenes, as pollute the imagination and inflame the passions? Do not our ears listen with greediness to the tale of scandal or the song of debauchery? Do not our tongues spit out “deadly poison,” or utter the language of “deceit,” “of cursing, and bitterness?” Do not our hands “deal with wickedness?” And do not our feet with greatest delight “run to evil?” Do we practise no intemperance; or do we not at least approach to the borders of gluttony, drunkenness, or lewdness? Have we formed no system of sloth, or effeminacy? Let us pursue these enquiries with impartial fidelity, for they may discover to us how far we understand the subject before us. “This is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour.—For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness *.”

There is a general gravity of deportment, a self-denying mortified spirit, a deadness to the world, a superiority to sensual enjoyments, which should be seen in all Christians, regulating their conversation and their outward appearance; totally opposite to the levity and dissipation so prevalent in the world. Thus “**HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD**” will be written on every part of

* 1 Thess. iv. 3, 4, 7.

them, as their peculiar and most honourable distinction; and their common actions will be acceptable as "spiritual sacrifices." "Unto the pure all things are pure*." We are aware, however, that many persons most egregiously mistake in placing their religion wholly in externals, like the ancient Pharisees, "making clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, whilst within they are full of extortion and of excess †." They may assume a demure countenance, and coarse garment; they may refuse to their bodies their proper and necessary refreshment and support, and practise great austerities in watchings, fastings, penances, and pilgrimages. Yet though these and such like uncommanded severities be very specious and procure applause, they do not constitute any real sanctity; but they may conceal and varnish over dispositions of mind most offensive to God. True religion doubtless will regulate our plans of life, even in minutest circumstances, in food, and dress; but we should be reminded, that "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink ‡," nor does it consist in any external garb, in the colour or the fashion of a coat: it is something of a higher and far more excellent nature. St. Peter therefore, while he warns christian women not to be solicitous about the

* Zech. xiv. 20. Titus i. 15.

† Matt. xxiii, 25.

‡ Rom. xiv. 17.

outward adorning of their persons, nor to distinguish themselves by gay and costly apparel, teaches them to cultivate inward purity, and in particular to seek after “the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price *.”

Sanctification, then, chiefly regards the state of the mind, and consists in giving to the will a proper bias, and to the affections a right direction; so that the Lord himself may be chosen, and his service prosecuted with vigour and delight. In other words, it is “to be spiritually minded:” it is that vital principle, which God the Spirit implants in the heart, and which is like its author, divine and holy. It is, as we have said, the restoration of the whole man: and therefore it extends to all the faculties of the soul. It will produce a purity in the memory, and in the general turn of the thoughts: it will bring the tempers under subjection, elevate the desires, and rectify the motives. It will counteract the effects of natural corruption in all its parts: it will deliver from the defilement, the power, the practice, and the very love, of sin. Such is the promise: “Sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace †.”

In its opposition to the various depravities of

* 1 Peter iii. 3, 4.

† Rom. vi. 14.

bur nature, it can make no exception; for it aims at the destruction of all iniquity. It shews no favour to “the besetting sin,” but rather directs its chief energies against it, as the most dangerous enemy. So also, while it inclines the heart to obedience, it cannot make any reserve, it cannot allow one of the divine precepts to be wilfully disregarded. It enjoins the strict observance of all duties, even those, which are accounted the most difficult, reproachful, inconvenient, and dangerous: and this too at all times and in all circumstances, never admitting of an apology for transgression. There may be various and formidable obstructions, yet the spiritual principle, as far as it prevails, must always excite to holy dispositions and to holy actions. Thus we are required to be “transformed by the renewing of our mind, that we may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God:” and we are assured, that no secret sin can be retained, “for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth*.” Alas! how many deceive themselves, and attempt to deceive others, by a partial obedience, or by occasional exertions to do good! They are loud in their invectives against some sins, but they plead warmly in vindication of others. There are seasons, when they express ardent desires and strong

* Rom. xii. 2. Eph. v. 9.

resolutions to be pious and devout; but they faint in their minds, and turn again unto folly. Such religion is radically defective: this is not the character of the saints of God, who are renewed in righteousness. But “blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord. Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek Him WITH THE WHOLE HEART. They also do no iniquity; they walk in his ways. Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently.” Let each one then reply, “O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes! Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto ALL thy commandments *.”

The extensive nature of sanctification, and its influence over the mind, will further appear, while we consider

II. Its peculiar effects, or the sentiments and dispositions to which it gives rise in the believer, according to the various objects presented to him. Let us enquire, what will be his appropriate spirit and conduct, by virtue of the grace which has purified his heart,

1. With respect to sin. “They that are in the flesh,” or in other words they who are un-sanctified, can look at iniquity without abhorrence, nay in many instances with pleasure. They long for opportunities of indulging in things

which are forbidden, and, though reprovèd and threatened, are unwilling to relinquish them. Not so the man of God, who “partakes of the divine nature.” He considers sin as an incalculable evil, more to be dreaded than any calamity. It excites his loathing and hatred, and he is eager to renounce it, in every shape and in every degree. Though it might be practised with impunity, or even escape detection, he will cast it from him with detestation. He searches it out through all its windings in the secret recesses of his heart. He deeply laments any occasional ascendancy it may gain over him, and with great importunity he prays and longs for complete and everlasting deliverance from it. Like Job, in the view of that pollution he has contracted, he exclaims, “Behold, I am vile! I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” And with the great apostle of the Gentiles, watching and striving against this base and subtle foe, he cries out with anguish, “I find a law” within me, “that when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man. But I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members. O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death *!” The same holy disposition will appear

* Job xl. 4. xlii. 6. Rom. vii. 21—24.

2. With respect to duty. The divine law must be the rule of our conduct. It is the expression of God's will concerning us, and therefore forms the only just standard of obedience. This however is disliked and hated by all those, who are actuated by mere natural principles, "having not the Spirit:" for "the carnal mind is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be*." But sanctification produces a total change of sentiments and dispositions upon this very subject. It is a completion of that gracious promise, "I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts†." Accordingly the faithful in Christ Jesus, under the deepest consciousness of guilt and depravity, will exclaim with David, "O how I love thy law! it is my meditation all the day! I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right‡." "The commandment," in its most extensive demands, is then approved and admired as "holy, and just, and good§." Duty is considered as a high privilege: it is attended to, not of constraint, but of a ready mind: it is practised with vigour and increasing delight, from spiritual motives; not with the mercenary disposition of a Pharisee, but from a grateful sense of mercies received; not with the terror of a slave, dreading punishment, but

* Rom. viii. 7.

† Psalm cxix. 97, 128.

‡ Heb. viii. 10.

§ Rom. vii. 12.

with the love of an affectionate child, rejoicing to do his father's will. No present attainments will then be rested in, or thought sufficient; but defects will be lamented, and ardent desires expressed for a more steadfast and pure obedience, for larger measures of holiness, and a more entire conformity to the divine will. Let each one enquire, Is this the state of my heart? Or, according to this evidence, do I possess any measure of sanctification? The same enquiry may be instituted

3. With respect to God. He is the great object, which should occupy our minds, engage our affections, direct and animate our pursuits. Where He is properly regarded, the state and prevailing dispositions of the soul must be right. But it is only by his own renovating influence, that any of our degenerate race are inclined to render him that supreme consideration, which is due. Men have cast off the fear of their Creator, and feel the spirit of rebels against his government. "There is no fear of God before their eyes*." But the invariable effect of the grace, which sanctifies, is to produce in them the deepest reverence for the divine majesty, and an unfeigned submission. Thus saith Jehovah, "I will put my fear in their hearts†." Their language will then be, "Lord, what wilt thou have

* Rom. iii. 18.

† Jer. xxxii. 40.

me to do?" and, even under the most painful discipline, "Let Him do, what seemeth Him good:"—"Not as I will, but as Thou wilt*." Nay more; the mind, that was "enmity against God," is now filled with his love, and burns with eager desire for nearer access to him, and more intimate communion with him†. Hence religious exercises will be accounted a delight: the day, the house, the ministry, the service of God, will excite ardent gratitude and joy. "O God, thou art my God, early will I seek thee:—As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God: My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God‡?" These are the appropriate aspirations, not of "the carnal mind," but of one who is born of God, and renewed by the Spirit. By virtue of this new nature, he proposes in the whole plan of his conduct a sublimer end to be attained, than worldly persons can believe or comprehend. "He lives unto the Lord;" and his supreme desire is to promote the divine honour by all his exertions; thus fulfilling the precept, "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God§." Such is the prevailing motive of the real Christian; and this, more than any other, discriminates him from the

* Acts ix. 6. 1 Sam. iii. 18. Matth. xxvi. 39.

† Rom. viii. 7. v. 5. Deut. xxx. 6.

‡ Psalm xlii. 1, 2. lxiii. 1. § Rom. xiv. 8. 1 Cor. x. 31.

formalist and the hypocrite. Is this the kind of religion, which we possess? Examine its effects again,

4. With respect to Christ. Sanctification belongs only to a fallen creature, and proceeds solely from the plan of redemption. It must therefore bear a special regard to Him, who by his merciful interposition has obtained all grace for us. It originates in a cordial application, and produces an entire subjection, to him in all the various offices, wherein he stands revealed, or proposes his aid, to our guilty and depraved race. It is accordingly to be distinguished by this supreme respect for the Saviour; and, where He is rejected or despised, it cannot exist even in the lowest measure. “Every man,” says Christ, “that hath heard and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto Me*.” The new and holy obedience, which the redeemed yield unto God, is called “the obedience of FAITH,” as springing from and being essentially connected with that divine principle; or “the obedience of CHRIST,” because it is paid to Him, who is their Lawgiver and their King†. Would you trace its effects? You will find them all in “the love of Christ?” It is this, which “constrains” the believer to undertake the most arduous services; which makes him “crucified to the world, and the world to him,”

* John vi. 45.

† Rom. xvi. 26. 2 Cor. x. 5.

rescuing him from its bondage, and rendering him superior to its allurements and its menaces. He strives to imitate his Lord's example, and possesses a conformity of disposition to him; because His Spirit dwelleth in him, and His image is formed in his heart. No higher description can be given of real, evangelical holiness. "He that saith he abideth in Christ, ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked:—for as He is, so are we in this world *." By virtue of this union and similitude, the saint of God may be discriminated in his progress by his fervent aspirations after the heavenly state, for the immediate vision, and uninterrupted fruition, of his Saviour. For whatever reasons he may wish to continue here, he "has a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better †." How few possess this excellent attainment! It is manifest, that Jesus Christ is not supremely regarded, but made light of, by vast multitudes around us; and therefore they are destitute of christian sanctification. Consider it also,

5. With respect to the Holy Spirit. The divine nature in Christians, from which all their holiness proceeds, is His work. He has implanted it, and He alone maintains it in its vigour. The effect produced is like its author: "That which is born of the Spirit, is spirit ‡." It cannot

* 1 John ii. 6. iv. 17.

† Phil. i. 23.

‡ John iii. 6.

therefore be, but that renewed persons approve and delight in the instructions and commands, which He delivers. “They are after the Spirit, and they mind the things of the Spirit* :” these occupy their thoughts, suit their taste, and afford them the highest and noblest satisfaction. The Holy Ghost is their guide; and they follow his directions. He works in them, exciting holy purposes and resolutions; and they obey his motions. They are to be distinguished by this very evidence: “they walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit:”—and they “are led by the Spirit†.” They are also cautioned, “not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God‡,” lest the work of sanctification be obstructed: and they are taught to depend upon his grace for its progress and completion. As they “live in, or by, the Spirit, they must also walk in the Spirit§.” Are they exemplary, zealous, and useful? Do they long for heaven, and anticipate its blessedness? All this they owe to his influence; and that influence they supplicate with ardour, they entirely rely on, and they acknowledge with grateful adoration. Such is their character: “fervent in Spirit;”—“through the Spirit waiting for the hope of righteousness by faith;”—and “abounding in hope through the power of the Holy

* Rom. viii. 5.

† Rom. viii. 1, 14.

‡ Eph. iv. 30.

§ Gal. v. 25.

Ghost*.” How different is the whole of this description from that system of ethics, which is built upon man’s supposed ability within himself, or the sufficiency of his own natural resources! Such a regard to the Spirit would be exploded by many, who boast of their Christianity: but without it, as we have seen, all endeavours after sanctification will be fruitless, and all pretences to it ostentatious and deceitful.

The work, which we have been considering, demands our admiration. How excellent the change, by which man is cleansed from the internal defilement contracted by the fall, and restored to his original purity! How beneficial and extensive the effects! They tend to gild the gloom of human life, and prepare the soul for the enjoyment of eternal blessedness. Let us trace it to its author. It must far exceed the powers of any creature. “Wherever we discover it, let us devoutly say, “This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvellous in our eyes†.” We must confess both the design and the operation to be every way worthy of Him. So they will appear, at least, in the final day, when the wondrous plan shall have received its full completion. Then shall loudest acclamations of praise and joy ascend to the throne of the

* Rom. xii. 11, xv. 13. Gal. v. 5.

† Psalm cxviii. 23.

Almighty, when the church shall be presented to the heavenly Bridegroom, “not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but” perfectly “holy and without blemish *.”

Let the enquiry be resumed, and prosecuted with the utmost seriousness, Who among us has attained any measures of this holiness? Let us ask still further, Who is sincerely desirous to attain it? Will you not covet earnestly this best of gifts? Or can you be satisfied without it? Your application for it shall not be in vain, if made by faith and prayer. We encourage you to ask it, as one of the precious fruits procured for us by the Redeemer’s death. Only remark, The blessing, of which we speak, is to be received, not in some only, but in **ALL** its parts. You know not its value, if you object to it in any degree. It is not to be divided. Say, therefore, “The very God of peace sanctify me **WHOLLY!**”

How wretched is the state, and how vile the character, of the man, who remains unsanctified! He is full of all evil affections! Not only is he defective in duty, but he does nothing good. His very “mind and conscience is defiled.” His heart is the residence of every unclean thing; and whilst it is “enmity against God,” what can be looked for from that pure

and holy Being, but “indignation and wrath?”
O that we could excite an alarm in every careless sinner, by holding up to his view his misery, his guilt, and his danger! Then would the remedy proposed be precious in his estimation, be ardently desired, and received with warmest gratitude to the Author and the Giver, who justly demands the praise,

ESSAY LIII.

ON THE PROGRESS OF SANCTIFICATION.

Sanctification is a gradual process, as appears from many express passages of scripture, which speak of the growth of grace,—from the similitudes made use of to describe the christian character,—and from the experience of believers.—Full perfection not attainable in this life, though to be desired and aimed at.—Objections to this spiritual progress answered.—The progress may be obstructed by remaining depravity,—by occasional temptations,—and by relapses into sin.

THE work of God in the renovation of the soul is always described as being in a state of advancement during the present life. It commences in regeneration; and then only men begin to be Christians, they enter upon a new life. Good principles are then implanted, but they are weak, and they have much to struggle with. To maintain, invigorate, and mature these principles is the great business of Sanctification, which is a gradual process, carried on under the direction

of infinite wisdom to the very moment of our dissolution. Thus spake the primitive believers concerning their own experience of this grace: "Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed DAY BY DAY*." Being partakers of a new nature, they "continued not in one stay:" but the vital principle, they had received, daily manifested increasing measures of strength and activity, even under the heavy pressure of afflictions and bodily decay. Happy progress indeed! Who would not rather envy their blessedness, than compassionate their distress? "The Lord hath done great things for them!" Yet this is in some sort the case of all true Christians.

Justification, as we have seen, admits not of any degrees: it is complete in every believer. But it is otherwise with the high privilege we are now considering. Sanctification is not perfected upon earth: it is capable of continual increase. One Christian may be more holy than another; and the same Christian is expected to be attaining larger measures of sanctity, according to his time and opportunities. "The inward man" is formed, and it must be entire as possessing all its members; for no one grace can properly be wanting in "the new creature:" but each member or grace may be in a weak state, and

* 2 Cor. iv. 16.

stand in need of constant supplies of strength, which will be gradually communicated by the divine Spirit. This is the subject before us: the growth of grace, or the progress of sanctification. There are those, who deny the reality of such a growth, and assert that the doctrine has no place in scripture: and there are many, who dislike the mention of it, because it detects their hypocrisy, or reproves their shameful inconsistencies and declensions. But the truth of God must be maintained, whoever may be offended or condemned by it.—We observe then,

I. Various passages of the sacred writings speak of this growth in most explicit terms: the followers of the Saviour are required to seek after it, and by this test to try and to evince their sincerity. St. Paul expresses his solicitude for the progress of the Philippians, by praying for them “that their love might abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment,” and thus declares to them his own earnest desire and expectation of continual advancement in grace: “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do; forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus *.” This spiritual prosperity

* Phil. i. 9. iii. 13, 14.

he discovered in the Thessalonian believers; and it excited his gratitude and joy: “We are bound,” said he, “to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth*.”

St. Peter is equally clear upon the point, and confirms the doctrine, when he exhorts those, who “have tasted that the Lord is gracious;”—“As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:” and again, “Beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness, but grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ†.” After such testimonies, will any one deny the possibility or necessity of the continued progress and increase of the spiritual principle in the soul? But if further evidence be wanted, we remark

II. The similitudes, which every where meet us in the scripture, incontestably prove it. Christians are described, not as coming instantaneously and by one effort to the possession of all grace, but as attaining a state of maturity by degrees, and, whilst they receive larger measures of wisdom, strength, and comfort, still urging on their way towards perfection. They are spoken of at their first outset as “new-born babes and little

* 2 Thess. i. 3.

† 1 Peter ii. 2, 3. 2 Peter iii. 17, 18.

children," weak and inexperienced; then they are addressed as "young men," full of vigour; and finally as "fathers," for their extended usefulness and solidity of judgment*. Their minds are gradually illuminated, even as the earth is by the increase of the morning light till the sun burst forth in his splendour: "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day †." They contain, like the precious metals, a mixture of dross and base alloy, from which they must be cleared, perhaps by slow as well as sharp operations: their Redeemer sits over them, "as a refiner and purifier of silver; and He shall purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness ‡."

Under the protection and culture, the wise and tender management of the great "Husbandman," they shall grow, from small beginnings, and by an imperceptible though certain increase, like the grass, the corn, or the trees of the vineyard, till the bloom and the fruit appear; and the fruit itself shall gradually ripen, till the time of gathering come §. The grace of God is the vital principle in their hearts, which shall spread its influence as "leaven:" its measure may be

* 1 Cor. iii. 1. Eph. iv. 14. 1 John ii. 13.

† Prov. iv. 18.

‡ Mal. iii. 3.

§ Hosea xiv. 5—7. Mark iv. 26—29. 1 Cor. iii. 7, 9.

small, but it will extend its operation, and pervade the whole mass*. Not only the church itself, but each particular member, is like an edifice, which by the supply of fresh materials will receive continual augmentation, till the plan of the great Architect be completed: thus “all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord †.”—Are these things consistent with the notion, that there is no advancement to be expected in the divine life, no spiritual improvement to be derived from the diligent use of the means of grace? Exploded be such a notion, as unscriptural, dangerous, destructive. Let us seek to abound yet more and more in all the fruits of righteousness.

III. An attention to the cases and experience of Christians will teach us the same lesson. What manner of persons do we observe them to be? Or how are they delineated in the holy scriptures? They differ from each other, not as to their general principles, but in the measures of grace which they possess. The weak and the strong are spoken of ‡: nor can we doubt, from a view of the most excellent characters, but that some are far more humble, spiritual, full of faith, of love, of zeal, of joy, than others of their brethren. Nay, they differ from themselves in different periods. Their progress in the good

* Matt. xiii. 33.

† Eph. ii. 21.

‡ Rbm. xv. 1.

ways of God is matter of notoriety: their “profiting may appear to all*.” We can trace, from the first faint appearances, a gradual improvement in knowledge, meekness, patience, dependence, activity, and heavenly-mindedness. “God has given the increase.”

They boast not indeed; they are not forward to perceive or allow any such improvement in themselves. They are in the daily habit of investigating and deploring their own deficiencies; and they continually supplicate “more grace.” This is a decided and discriminating evidence of their piety: such at least is not the general temper or the practice of others. But those, who love and serve the Lord with sincerity, and even with fervour, are ashamed that they do it in so small a measure, and with so frequent interruptions. Their language is, “My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy word! The good that I would, I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do †!” These complaints do not argue any declension or hypocrisy; but rather the reverse: they do not arise from gloom or despondency, but are just and well grounded.

The truth of the case is, that the most righteous men come short of the mark which is proposed, and which they ought to have attained: they

* 1 Tim. iv. 15.

† Psalm cxix. 25. Rom. vii. 19.

feel a propensity to evil, and do actually and openly transgress. If they never absolutely renounced their principles or their obedience, yet are they at all times chargeable with a criminal imperfection. Their faith, their love, their zeal, and spirituality, are not at any moment so pure or so lively as they ought to be. Though these graces be genuine, the measure is defective. But it is a more grievous consideration, that they feel an internal disposition to revolt, by which they are sometimes most shamefully overcome. Such are the accounts given us by those, who could not mistake the case:—"There is no man that sinneth not. Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin? There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not. For in many things we offend all: if any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man. If we say, that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*." Agreeably to this description, some of the most eminent saints have fallen for a season into a state of "backsliding," by the commission of gross iniquity, and their examples are recorded for our admonition. But could they so depart, if the work of sanctification were completed? May we learn for ourselves, not to presume upon

* 1 Kings viii. 46. Prov. xx. 9. Eccles. vii. 20.

James iii. 2. 1 John i. 8.

our strength or our attainments, but to pray that we may be “renewed day by day,” and “leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, go on unto perfection*.”

Many objections are brought against this representation.—It is said, that absolute perfection is spoken of in the scriptures as attainable, and as actually attained by many persons in the present life. Several considerations are necessary for the reconciling of the various passages, which have reference to this subject. Believers are described as “complete or perfect in Christ Jesus†;” and so they are, as to their justification and their final security. They are denominated “perfect,” as being sincere and upright, “in whose spirit there is no guile;”—and even “perfect and complete in all the will of God,” because to that will they pay an entire and unreserved regard, not being dissemblers or partial in their obedience as hypocrites are‡. Perfection of holiness, in its most full and absolute sense, is the object of their desires, their prayers, and their pursuits: with renewed efforts they press forwards to it, but still they lament their distance;—“Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that, for which also I am apprehended of

* 2 Cor. iv. 16. Heb. vi. 1. † Col. i. 28. ii. 10.

‡ Gen. vi. 9. Job i. 1. Psalm xxxii. 2. Col. iv. 12.

Christ Jesus*.” They are not therefore so delivered from all depraved affections, or so conformed to the image of God in any one principle, as to render all additional supplies of grace unnecessary or superfluous. But their entire and complete sanctification is what they look and ardently long for, as the great felicity of heaven; and while they are in the body, they are daily supplicating those purifying influences of the Spirit, which may make them more and more “meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light †.”

Others object on different grounds, and from a view of their continued depravity deny the growth and progress, if not the reality, of holiness in believers. Perhaps they argue from their own case: they perceive no improvement in themselves; they have lost the fervour of their “first love;” and so frequent are their failures, that in their own apprehension they become worse and worse. We should beware however of drawing general deductions from particular instances, because those instances may not be exactly ascertained or well described. What appear similar, may differ widely from each other: and therefore we should not be disposed to give the same answer indiscriminately to all who deplore the deficiencies of Christians.

* Phil. iii. 12.

† Col. i. 12.

Some may be entirely destitute of divine grace, who yet are firm and vehement in their defence of evangelical doctrines. They may assume the form, without the power of godliness: and with warm professions of regard to Christ, they may retain a secret hostility in their hearts. On such men's imperfections we need not enlarge: it is enough to say, that their insincerity is detected. But they furnish a striking admonition, and seem to call aloud to all who bear the name of Christ, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves: know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates *?"

Others may be unfitted, through bodily disease, mental distress, perhaps derangement, or spiritual temptation, for judging properly of their own state and character. Their decisions therefore are not to be regarded; since they may be altogether false and delusive, as much so as the wild and incoherent reveries of our dreams. Such persons indeed have a strong claim to our compassion, and should be treated with much tenderness and forbearance; but they should be exhorted for the present to abstain from all positive conclusions respecting themselves, and to wait till the mist be dispersed, before they institute an enquiry concerning those objects, which they cannot now clearly discriminate.

Many also lay down improper marks of spiritual growth and prosperity, by which their judgments are warped, and their inferences are most probably erroneous. They suppose, that those only are making progress, who are lively, warm, and confident, who can distinguish accurately between different systems, who can debate or pray with great fluency or variety of expression, and who enjoy strong and uninterrupted consolation. Not belonging to this description, they are forward to condemn themselves. The mistake is common and very dangerous. Beware, lest, while some are puffed up with vain presumption, you give way to despondency, by ungratefully denying the work of God, or rejecting the comfort which He tenders. What, though your views of divine truth be confused and obscure, though you be slow of speech, or much harassed with doubts and fears about your spiritual state? You may be safe; nay, you may be advancing in christian graces, far beyond those who may be admired and envied for their specious gifts and splendid attainments.

There may be a real and solid improvement in religion, which may not procure applause or attract observation. You, who are perplexed and almost confounded by very painful conflicts, may be more established in the knowledge of yourselves, and in a simple reliance on the Saviour; you may experience deeper convictions of sin,

more unfeigned penitential sorrow, more meekness and gentleness of spirit, more deadness to the world, than some others who know not your trials, who soar aloft in profession, and triumph in the full assurance of salvation. In the spiritual growth, of which we speak, the process is secret and mysterious, and generally carried on by imperceptible degrees. The case is similar in the growth of corn and trees : and why may we not allow, that the way of the Lord may frequently elude our notice in the operations of grace, as it does in those of providence.

Yet the process is not so carried on, as to admit of no interruption. There may be an occasional declension in sincere and eminent believers: their hopes and comforts are suspended ; the reality of their spiritual life becomes dubious. But this circumstance forms no proper objection to the general doctrine. The bodily constitution of a youth, rising up to the vigour of manhood, may be shaken and impaired for a season by an incidental disease, which may soon be removed. His general state may nevertheless be that of sound health, and of a gradual advancement to full strength and maturity. If therefore you urge your own grievous misimprovement, you should be entreated to consider whether this may not be accounted for, on principles consistent with the positions here laid down :—whether it may not justly be ascribed to your negligence and wrong

compliances. The divine influence in sanctification may meet with various obstructions; and these furnish so many cogent arguments for vigilance and prayer.

The grand impediment is the inherent principle of depravity. This is a source of continual opposition to the grace of God, and a source of continual difficulty and distress to the most watchful and exemplary Christian. It is the “sin that dwelleth in him;” it is “the law in his members, warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin, which is in his members.” It is “the body of death,” which, while he loaths it, he is compelled to drag about with him, and which prevents him from soaring upwards, as he could wish, with holy and heavenly affections. It is “the flesh, which lusteth against the Spirit, so that he cannot do the things that he would*.” It is “the infection of nature,” which, as the church declares, “doth remain, yea, in them that are regenerated, whereby the lust of the flesh is not subject to the law of God†.”

Temptation is another cause of hindrance. The Christian, in his progress, is called to maintain a conflict against many potent, subtle, and malignant adversaries,—“against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in

* Rom. vii. 17—24. Gal. v. 17.

† Article ix.

high places*.” Sometimes the onset may be so violent as to unfit him for religious duties, may deprive him of all serious attention and composure, may baffle all his resolutions, and fill him with horrible, profane, and blasphemous thoughts. In such a state of things, can he possibly suppose that his sanctification is carried on? The work appears to be interrupted, if not entirely suspended. But sad as the case is, good will issue from it. The believer will come forth purified from the furnace, and will shine the brighter. The permission given to Satan to practise his impious wiles, is intended of God, under his own wise, holy, and all-controlling influence, finally to promote the purposes of his grace.

The Christian is then most of all obstructed, when he relapses into sin by some foul miscarriage. How often does the case occur! and how extensive is the mischief! The effects of backsliding are tremendous in every view. It dishonours God, it grieves his Spirit, and constrains him to depart; it causes the enemies of religion to triumph and blaspheme; and to the offender himself the injury is incalculable: it impedes his course, it deprives him of all solid and lively evidence of grace, and excites in him fear, horror, and despondency. Of one so situated what can we pronounce? It were absurd to talk of the progress of his sanctification, when no proofs

* Eph. vi. 12.

even of its reality are for the present to be adduced. We may hope for his recovery, and his re-establishment in peace and holiness. But he has lost ground, and he will suffer unutterable anguish ; though he may hereafter learn wisdom from his past folly, and be the more circumspect, steadfast, and exemplary. How many, who have so fallen, are constrained to cry out in the bitterness of their soul, “ Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation,—that the bones, which thou hast broken, may rejoice * ! ” O let us beware of resisting the work of God !

We should admire the patience and long-suffering of God, who still carries on his plan of mercy in opposition to the perverseness and obstinacy of man. How amazing the riches of his grace, and “ the working of his mighty power, which worketh in us mightily ! ” He implants and He preserves the spiritual life against the united efforts of many enemies. Our continued perseverance in faith and holiness must be ascribed to Him, and it is as wonderful, as if a spark of fire should be kept alive upon a tempestuous ocean. O what thanks and praise will ascend unto Him, from all the redeemed, upon the final completion of this stupendous work !

There is a progress of a different sort. The careless sinner is advancing in his course, and is hastening, though gradually, to a state of

consummate wickedness and to final perdition. This affords a sad, but a striking, contrast to the subject we have been considering. The carnal man is steady to his purpose; he presses forward in his way against many difficulties; and step by step as he advances, he acquires increasing strength and courage. He is more and more confirmed in his principles, and attached to his plan of action. He increases in his knowledge of evil, in his zeal to promote it, and in the pertinacity of his resolutions to persevere in it. His sphere of mischief is enlarged, and he grows in a meetness for the infernal society of devils, "fitted to destruction." While we mourn and weep for such an example of depravity and wretchedness, let us beware for ourselves, and "exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any of us be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin *!"

* Heb. iii. 13.

ESSAY LIV.

ON THE COMPLETION OF SANCTIFICATION.

The work of God in sanctification, however opposed and obstructed, will be carried on and completed, as appears,—from the general testimony of the inspired writers,—from the perfections and engagements of God,—from the offices and relations of the Redeemer,—and from the work of the Holy Spirit. Objections answered,—from declarations of scripture, apparently opposite,—from exhortations and cautions given,—from the falls of eminent saints,—and from the supposed dangerous tendency of the doctrine.

STRONG and incessant opposition is made to the work of divine grace. The appearances may at some seasons be very formidable; and, looking only at human probabilities, we may tremble for the event. The difficulties indeed to us are perfectly insurmountable: but the matter rests not upon human vigour and ability. An infinitely wise and mighty architect conducts the plan, and He has engaged for a safe and happy

termination. Thus we may apply the message of mercy to the prophet:—"Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts. Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and He shall bring forth the head-stone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it?—The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation,—His hands shall also finish it.—For who hath despised the day of small things *?"

This involves a doctrine of peculiar importance in the christian system, high and mysterious we allow, but confirmed to us by clear and decisive evidence, and calculated to inspire the true believer with lively hope, with courage, zeal, and joy. He stands in need of this support: let him not hesitate to accept the "strong consolation," and glorify God for the inviolable security, which is given him. The position then to be maintained is, That wherever the vital principle of sanctification exists, though now in a weak state, it will be matured and completed; though obstructed and suspended, it is never totally extirpated; it will abide, or be revived, and finally be perfected in a state of uninterrupted and immaculate holiness. It is, as we conceive, the fair conclusion to be drawn

I. From the general testimony of the inspired

* Zech. iv. 6—10.

writers. We meet with clear and explicit declarations upon the subject: such are the following. “The righteous shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger *.” Can this be affirmed with confidence or truth, if the event of real religion be uncertain, and “the seed of God” may finally perish? The reason assigned for the proficiency and perseverance of believers is, “The Lord will not cast off his people, neither will he forsake his inheritance †.” He binds himself by covenant to be constant in his regards to them, and by his own strong and abiding influences in their hearts to secure them from apostasy: for thus he speaks, “I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me ‡.”

Let us hear the Saviour’s declarations, assuring his faithful followers of certain preservation in all dangers, and of a happy termination of all their conflicts. “I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.—I am the Resurrection and the Life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die §.” May they not therefore indulge the

* Job xvii. 9. † Psalm xciv. 14. ‡ Jer. xxxii. 40.

§ John x. 28. xi. 25, 26.

humble confidence, without incurring the charge of presumption, that no enemy shall ultimately prevail against them, but that under his care and protection they shall persevere in faith and holiness, till they receive the consummation of their felicity?

The apostles gave credit to their Master, and, deriving encouragement from his words, they administered the same consolation to other believers. St. Peter assures them, not only that a glorious “inheritance is reserved in heaven for them,” but that they are “kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time*.” St. John declares, that “the anointing, which they have received of Him, abideth in them,—and that they shall abide in Him†.” St. Paul, inspired with the same confidence, inculcated the same doctrine in all the churches of Christ, that he might comfort and animate them with the assured expectation of the completion of holiness. He exhorted the Corinthians to conclude from the faithfulness of God, “by whom they were called unto the fellowship of his Son,” that he would “confirm them unto the end, that they might be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ‡.” On the same ground, after praying for the entire sanctification of the Thessalonians, and for the pre-

* 1 Peter i. 4, 5.

† 1 John ii. 27.

‡ 1 Cor. i. 8, 9.

servation of their whole spirit and soul and body in a blameless state, "unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ," he triumphed in the thought, that "He who called them was faithful, and would do it*." This is not the language of doubt or uncertainty.

His declaration concerning the perseverance of the Philippians, and the happy termination of that gracious principle they had manifested, is so strong and decisive, that upon this alone we might venture to rest the merits of the case: "Being confident," he said, "of this very thing, that He, which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ†." What this work is, we can be at no loss to ascertain. It is the mysterious process of Sanctification: it is "the work of God:" not, as some would explain it, the external reception or establishment of Christianity AMONG THEM (for this did not remain at Philippi, according to the expectation which the apostle here expressed, nor can we presume upon such a continuance of the gospel in any one place), but the internal influence of divine grace IN THEM, which under God's superintending care will abide in true believers. This is indeed "a good work;" it is truly excellent in itself, as an emanation from the Spirit, the author of all holiness, and

* 1 Thess. v. 23, 24.

† Phil. i. 6.

beneficial in its tendency, as leading to all happiness, and to all righteousness. It is described as a gradual operation; for it is "begun," and is yet unfinished. In this imperfect state, then, what can be pronounced of it? Yes, "God will perform it." But may we conclude upon the event? We are "confident of this very thing," said the apostle. Now, there must be strong grounds for this certain expectation; and those must be sought, not from the strength and sufficiency of man, but from God alone, who will not abandon his design. But might not these Philippians, though sincere at the time, at last disappoint his hopes? Though then partakers of the promises, might they not finally perish? This would be the inference of some persons: but St. Paul argued otherwise. He was confident, that the work would be carried on "until the day of Jesus Christ," and then terminate in glory: and this confidence it was, which excited his gratitude and joy "for their fellowship in the gospel." Nor was the case singular: the same hope and consolation we may derive

II. From the perfections and engagements of God. All his attributes are such as forbid the apprehension of his forsaking those, whom it hath pleased Him to make his people. His IMMUTABILITY forbids it. He is not variable and inconstant as we are: and therefore, having formed the purpose of salvation in any instance,

it is not to be conceived that He will recede from it. He says to his ancient church, "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee *." All the gifts and effects of his grace are the fruits of his eternal and unchangeable counsel: and on that account he will not destroy or cast off those, whom he hath called. Thus he declares, "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed †."

His wisdom also forbids it. He cannot have erred in his plans, nor can He fail, as we do, through ignorance. Nothing is casual or unexpected to Him. He had a full view of all the treachery and perverseness of his people; yet he loved and he adopted them. Will he afterwards abandon them, as if he had mistaken their character? He foreknew all cases and events, which could possibly occur, and must have calculated upon them. He cannot therefore give up his point, as we do when involved in unforeseen difficulties: nor can he ever be at a loss for means to accomplish his wishes and designs.

His power forbids it. This attribute is expressly pledged for the preservation of his people, and for their attainment of the eternal inheritance ‡. "My Father, who gave them me," says Christ, "is greater than all; and no man is able

* Jer. xxxi. 3.

† Mal. iii. 6.

‡ 1 Peter i. 4, 5.

to pluck them out of my Father's hand*." If they are ultimately overcome and perish by their enemies, there must be an imputation of weakness upon their Keeper. Is this possible? "The Lord is thy Keeper: the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: He shall preserve thy soul."—"They that trust in the Lord shall be as the mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people, from henceforth even for ever†." Can Omnipotence be overcome?

His GOODNESS forbids it. All our hopes originate from this source. Because He is gracious and "delighteth in mercy," we are encouraged to approach him and expect a favourable reception. So likewise, not our merits but his kindness, "the exceeding riches of his grace," imbolden us to expect the continuance of his affectionate regard. He will express his displeasure at the folly and frowardness of his children; but "He will not always chide, neither will he keep his anger for ever‡." Their intercourse with him may therefore be interrupted; but the constancy of his love should raise them above the desponding fear of final dereliction. Let

* John, x. 28.

† Psalm cxxi. 5, 7. cxxv. 1, 2.

‡ Psalm ciii. 9.

them exclaim in faith and hope, "The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me: thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever: forsake not the works of thine own hands *."

Above all, his FAITHFULNESS forbids it. As he is true to his word, he will strictly fulfil all his engagements. With the strongest confidence, therefore, we may depend upon his gracious declarations: and his promises in Christ Jesus provide for our security, not for a day, but to the end of our pilgrimage, and for ever. On this foundation rests the perseverance of believers. They have intrusted themselves and all their concerns in the hands of the God of truth, and He has pledged himself to them by the most solemn assurances, that "they shall not perish, but have everlasting life."—"Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us †." Such are "the sure mercies of David," secured to all his spiritual seed in their exalted Head: "If they break my statutes, and walk not in my judgments," says the almighty Father, "Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their

* Psalm cxxxviii. 8.

† Heb. vi. 17, 18.

iniquity with stripes: Nevertheless, my loving kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail: My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips*.” Shall we controvert, or doubt of, these assurances, or not rather confide in them with composure and firmness of mind?

It were absurd to say, that He will be faithful, if we should prove so. For though this position be true, it seems to rest upon a false and dangerous notion, that we are sufficient of ourselves to maintain a stability in religion, which shall entitle us to the blessings of the promise: whereas we are continually prone to act a treacherous part, and to violate our most sacred engagements. If we are enabled to “cleave unto the Lord with purpose of heart,” it is only by “the supply of the Spirit,” which He has taught us to ask and to expect. In other words, our faithfulness to Him results entirely from his faithfulness to us, and from the completion of his own merciful declarations.

Let us review the conduct of his grace toward believers in time past, and we must allow it to be such, as may properly encourage them for the future to rest assured of his continued favour, and of their perseverance in holiness. Has he justified them, and will he afterwards condemn

* Psalm lxxxix. 31—34.

them? Has he adopted them into his family, as the children of his love; and will he now abandon them to the malice of Satan? He accepted them without any previous merit, and in the view of all their subsequent ingratitude and depravity: how can we suppose, that he will cast them off for the unworthiness, which he foresaw? “If, when they were enemies, they were reconciled to God by the death of his Son; much more being reconciled, they shall be saved by his life*.” The honour of God, we perceive, is concerned in their preservation; and therefore we conclude, that “He will not forsake them, FOR HIS GREAT NAME’S SAKE†.”

The doctrine before us enters into all the grand principles of Christianity. It may justly be deduced

III. From the offices and relations, which the Redeemer bears. He came from heaven, assumed our nature, lived and died for his people. They are his property, being bought with the inestimable price of his blood: and, after all that he has done for them, will he relinquish his purchase? Or will he leave the matter altogether doubtful, whether any of those, for whom he gave himself, shall finally be saved by him? His design was, to “redeem them from all iniquity, and purify them unto himself‡.” Will this

* Rom. v. 10.

† 1 Sam. xii. 22.

‡ Titus ii. 14.

design be frustrated? But unless the perseverance and perfect sanctification of believers be secured, all must remain uncertain, and it may be found at last that he has died entirely in vain. This is a supposition too horrible, to be entertained for a moment.

Believers intrust themselves in his hands, for these among other purposes, that He may transform them into his own likeness, defend them by his power from all assaults of their enemies, and conduct them in safety to the end of their pilgrimage. He accepts the surrender, and engages that the sacred deposit, thus delivered to him, shall be preserved to his heavenly kingdom. In confidence of his unremitting care over them, they can possess peace and hope and joy, in the midst of many and great dangers, and say with holy triumph, "I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day *."

They are "members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." And, after such an union with him, are they to be separated and abandoned? Will he, the living Head, ever cease to regard or to protect those, who form a part of himself? And while he continues his influence to them, must not their spiritual life be effectually secured?

“He is the Saviour of the body *.” But if any one member perish, for the same reason every other might:—Then where is the body?

They are his Spouse; and he is bound to them, as the tenderest husband to the wife of his choice, by the warmest affection and inviolable promises. This is an union not to be dissolved: and therefore to banish all their jealousies, and to establish their confidence in him, He thus assures them, “I will betroth thee unto me FOR EVER; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving kindness, and in mercies †.”

He intercedes for them in heaven, and his petitions will prevail, that their miscarriages, though heinous, may not be fatal, and that the divine principle may still be maintained within them: this unfolds the secret; this alone accounts for their perseverance. Thus he warned and encouraged his boasting servant, previously to his sad fall: “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not ‡.” The backsliding Peter therefore was recovered, and pardoned, and preserved to eternal life.

By his mediation he engages the power of the

* Eph. v. 23, 30.

† Hosea ii. 19.

‡ Luke xxii. 31, 32.

Father to conduct them safely through all the snares and dangers, which may beset them in their road to his kingdom. "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom Thou hast given me.—I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil." Nay, he claims an admission for them into heaven, which manifestly presupposes the requisite preparation, their perseverance in holiness, and the completion of their sanctification. "Father, I will that they, whom Thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which Thou hast given me*." He has himself taken possession of the inheritance in their name, as their "forerunner" and representative: and having "prepared a place for them," he will not leave them to perish; "He will come again, and receive them unto himself." Is it still uncertain, whether they will persevere? No: their life is bound up with His, which is pledged for their continuance and security. For thus he speaks, "Because I live, ye shall live also †."

We draw the same inference

IV. From the work of the Holy Spirit. This divine agent "dwells in" all the faithful; He is given to them "to abide with them:" He

* John xvii. 11, 15, 24.

† John xiv. 2, 3, 19. Heb. vi. 20.

consecrates them to himself, as his “habitation” and his “temple:” and He will maintain his residence, at least he will not finally relinquish it, though to express his displeasure he may depart for a season. He has undertaken the work of purification, and he will finish. This we conclude from the descriptions given of his offices and of his own infinite perfections.

The spiritual life of believers, or their sanctification, is no other than an emanation from Him. Will this sacred stream cease to flow? It is, as our Lord declares, “the well of water, which shall be in them, springing up into everlasting life*.” Any thing short of the final event will not fulfil the promise. It is “the unction of the Holy One,” which “abideth in them,” and by which “they shall abide in Him:” and it is this principle, which discriminates them from hypocrites and apostates. It is therefore called “the incorruptible seed,”—“the seed of God, which remaineth in them;” so that their “leaf” and their “fruit” does not finally “wither,” nor do they “forsake their God as the wicked doth †.” Take from them this security, and no strength or energies of their own will be sufficient to preserve them.

They view with thankfulness what God has done for them, and from the past they are taught

* John iv. 14.

† 1 John ii. 20. 27. iii. 9. Psalm i. 3.

to rest assured of the completion of their sanctification and of their felicity. “It is God,” they say, “who hath sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts*.” What do these expressions imply, but a certainty of the great event to the truly regenerate? Is the contract “SEALED” to them? Then there shall be a full performance. Have they received an “EARNEST?” This is a sacred pledge from Him, who cannot fail in his engagements: it is a part of payment, and an infallible security, that in due season he will bestow the whole of the promised inheritance. They are therefore said to be “sealed,” not for a time only, but “unto the day of redemption†.”

In like manner, they “have the first-fruits of the Spirit‡.” Now, first-fruits are the pledge and the commencement of harvest, valuable in themselves, but particularly precious as containing an assurance, that “the ingathering” is approaching, and that the full produce shall soon be secured. Thus the graces of the Spirit, the holy principles, tempers, and habits, which he forms in believers, amount to a declaration, that “He will establish their hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints§.”

* 2 Cor. i. 22.

† Eph. iv. 30.

‡ Rom. viii. 23.

§ 1 Thess. iii. 13.

What an enlarged and exalted view of the great plan of divine mercy does this doctrine exhibit! The three persons of the Godhead, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, all united in the contrivance and execution: all engaged and pledged for the completion of the work, in the final and everlasting salvation of all them that believe! Let us study the subject for the confirmation of our faith and hope, and for the increase of our joy and zeal! “Do not our hearts burn within us?” O let us trust, and love, and praise, and wonder!

Yet the doctrine, though so strongly confirmed, is much opposed. Various objections are urged: they are such however, as admit of a satisfactory answer.

1. Many texts of scripture seem to suppose the possibility of the final miscarriage and everlasting rejection of the righteous*. But it may be replied, that the members of the outward and visible church, though unsound in heart, and destitute of grace, are often spoken of as righteous and believers, being so by profession, by engagement, and appearance, and are so to be accounted in the judgment of charity, till their real characters appear. These may and do apostatize: in general, it pleases God to suffer them to fall

* Such are Ezek. xviii. 24. Matth. xiii. 20, 21. John xv. 2, 6. Rom. xi. 17—22. 1 Tim. i. 19. Heb. vi. 4—6. x. 26, 38. 2 Peter ii. 20—22.

into such snares, as detect their insincerity. Their departure and destruction do not contradict the proper statement of this doctrine. An apostle has given the true explanation of the case; but upon principles, which invalidate every other system: "They went out from us, but they were not of us: for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest, that they were not all of us *." These apostates did never belong to the true church: in their best days they did not possess the discriminating principle of divine grace: "They were not of us." Had they been partakers of "the Spirit of holiness," they would not have suffered so tremendous a "shipwreck:" "They would no doubt have continued with us." They admonish us therefore to beware, "lest any man fail of the grace of God," or rest satisfied with the mere semblance of religion.

2. The exhortations and cautions given to those, who profess the gospel, are said to contradict the doctrine. It is allowed, that they are charged to look well to themselves, to take heed, to fear, to watch, to keep their own hearts†. These are all important and necessary duties, perfectly consistent with this representation.

* 1 John ii. 19.

† 1 Cor. ix. 27. x. 12. Heb. iii. 12. iv. 1. xii. 15.

2 Peter iii. 17. 2 John 8. Jude 21.

Such attention, vigilance, and assiduity, are highly expedient for all, and are God's appointed method of carrying on the work of sanctification in his people. They tend to check presumption, excite a holy jealousy, increase humility, and quicken obedience. Believers should be reminded, that they may fall into grievous offences, and therefore that they ought always to be upon their guard. These warnings, so frequent in the sacred writings, the ministers of Christ should strenuously enforce. They will prove most salutary, with the divine blessing, even to the most eminent Christians, and will conduce to their final perseverance. O suffer gladly the word of exhortation, that you "draw not back unto perdition!"

3. The falls of many excellent persons, such as Noah, Lot, David, Solomon, and Peter, are thought incongruous to our statement. It is allowed, that these, and other exemplary saints, departed from God; but as it appears undeniable, that they were recovered, and that "their backsliding was healed," their restoration furnishes an argument for the doctrine in question. Why were they not left to perish, but that "God is faithful?" He will therefore rescue his people out of every snare, and "will preserve them unto his heavenly kingdom." There is no one clear case recorded of a real saint becoming finally an apostate. Judas was not of this character; he

was false-hearted throughout: of some other persons, as Demas, we have no clear account, whether they were indeed regenerate, or whether after their falls they were not brought back again to God. It were absurd to ask, what would have become of those saints who fell, if they had died without repentance? For, on our supposition, their lives were in God's hands, even in their deepest declensions; and, if it be so, that He will not desert his charge, or suffer one of his children to perish, he could not but watch over them, to preserve and to recover them, and to make them meet for his kingdom.

4. The doctrine advanced is said to be of a dangerous tendency. This is a consideration of peculiar importance, and demands our serious attention. We apprehend, however, that the charge cannot be proved.

It is urged, that to persuade men that grace is secured to them for the completion of their salvation will induce them to neglect the means. Now, it is evident in fact that the means are neglected; and they will be so upon one system as well as another, in consequence of human depravity. But the system here defended will not produce that effect, if it be maintained, as it ought to be, that those means are appointed for the sanctification of our souls, and are as necessary for the accomplishment of the object proposed, as the labour of the husbandman is to fertilize the earth and to

secure the harvest, or as our daily food to sustain the life and vigour of our bodies. For who, with this conviction, will trifle away his opportunities?

It is objected also, that believers, presuming upon their recovery, will be encouraged to sin. Such a gross abuse of the divine goodness is indeed to be dreaded; but we trust it is not a necessary consequence. What is the perseverance we contend for? It is a progress, not in sin, but in holiness: and if this be certainly provided for by the covenant of grace, the objection must fall to the ground; the abuse supposed will be prevented, whatever may be the tendencies of our nature. It should also be remembered, that no man can properly derive comfort from the doctrine, any farther than as he evinces the sincerity by the fruits of his faith. On this ground it furnishes the strongest incitement to diligence in duty. It may indeed deliver the established believer from the dread of damnation; but it impresses his mind with many other forcible arguments against sin; such are, the sense of God's displeasure, to which it will expose him; the horror of conscience it will excite in him; the loss of spiritual comforts which he will sustain; the temporal calamities he may expect to suffer; and the dishonour he will bring upon the gospel, by misconduct. Will these considerations produce no salutary influence?

The principles we have asserted will awaken more powerful motives for holiness than any other

plan. They will inspire gratitude and love, the most vigorous affections of the human mind, which will continually stimulate the Christian to fresh exertions in the service of his God and Saviour. They will give him confidence and joy, in the midst of the most formidable dangers, and imbolden him to maintain the conflict with all his spiritual enemies, till he be crowned with victory. For thus he triumphs; "In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us*." Such was the assurance of the apostles and other first Christians: and who will presume to say, that the effect upon their tempers and practice was mischievous? We are persuaded also, notwithstanding the disgrace which truth has suffered from impostors, that an examination of living characters would be favourable to the cause, and that the very excellent examples of numbers of those who support the doctrine would invalidate these objections.

Let none presume then upon the confidence of their security, who are not willing to devote themselves to God in Jesus Christ without reserve, or who do not walk circumspectly in all holy conversation. Their rejoicing is fallacious and dangerous, not being accompanied with the testimony of their conscience, "that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but

* Rom. viii. 37.

by the grace of God, they have had their conversation in the world *." Is that our case?

Probably many sincere persons may be perplexed and harassed by the dread of apostasy and perdition. This may arise from an ignorance of the covenant and of the liberty of the gospel, or from unbelief. We exhort you therefore to seek for an increase of knowledge and of faith; and that dread, which has brought you into bondage, will in due season be removed; though, when most established in hope, you may still retain a fear, which will render you humble, watchful, and diligent.

Christians, you may and should rejoice in expectation, that the work of your sanctification, which is the object of your fervent desires, will be finally completed. Many distresses and obstructions you will meet with, in your present state of conflict; but these will soon cease. Your corruptions and temptations will not follow you beyond the grave: and O! how delightful the prospect of perfect holiness! Say then, with a devout exultation, "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake with thy likeness. I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord, that he will deliver me from the body of this death †."

How different are the views and expectations of ungodly men! Sinners, you will not understand

* 2 Cor. i. 12.

† Psalm xvii. 15. Rom. vii. 24, 25.

this doctrine, or probably you may be disposed to abuse it. Be this, however, to yourselves! You should be warned, that it will afford no plea, no shelter for you. We would remind you of “the terrors of the Lord,” which is a subject more suited to your state and character; and yet we can invite you by his mercies. “Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin.—For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye*.”

* Ezek, xviii. 30, 32.

ESSAY LV.

ON THE AUTHOR AND MEANS OF SANCTIFICATION.

Sanctification has God for its author,—cannot be effected by human restraints or exertions,—on account of man's corruption and inability.—It is what God promises,—the Saviour has obtained,—good men pray for,—the Spirit produces.—But it is carried on by general means,—the revealed word,—the sacraments,—prayer,—afflictions,—and by continued faith in Christ.

IT should excite our gratitude and joy, to be assured that there is a possibility of being raised from that state of moral degeneracy into which we are sunk, of being renewed and restored to the divine image. But the mere proposal of the blessing should not satisfy us, without the actual possession. Let every reader enquire, with heart-felt solicitude for himself, How may it become mine? It shall be the business of the present essay to give directions to those who sincerely desire information, to guard against prevailing

mistakes, and to suggest the necessary instruction upon this most interesting subject. There are two points of especial importance, on which our attention should be fixed,—that it is the prerogative of God to sanctify the human soul,—and that He is pleased to make use of means for the operations of his grace.

I. Sanctification must be ascribed to God as its author: the work is exclusively his own. A deep conviction of our entire inability is in the first place requisite. Many, through ignorance of themselves or a superficial acquaintance with the state of human nature, set out upon a wrong plan, with much self-confidence and presumption: others, from the same causes, are greatly hindered in their progress: and not a few, by the repeated failures of their own strenuous exertions, are almost driven to despair, as if the object were altogether unattainable. How many, and how mischievous, have been the inventions of folly, of pride, and superstition, in order to correct and subdue the sinful propensities of the heart of man! Recourse has been had to painful and expensive pilgrimages, severe penances, long abstinence, cruel lacerations of the body; and full dependence has been placed upon them. Hence arose a religion of “will worship,” consisting chiefly of austerities uncommanded and of no efficacy whatever, which long prevailed and held the world in bondage.

Genuine Christianity will teach us, that no restraints or impositions, under which we may possibly be placed, will ever renovate the soul. They may obstruct the course of our corruptions for a time: but these probably, after a short restriction, will break forth with increased violence, and defy all resistance. Or it may be, that the professed penitent deceives himself, while he supposes that he has attained real sanctity by a multiplicity of external mortifications. He may remain at as great a distance as ever from internal purity, with vast attention to forms of devotion, with demure countenance, and an apparent contempt of all corporeal enjoyments. His depravity is not eradicated, whatever branches may be cut off. The polluted streams may be driven from one channel, but they still flow in another. The filthy sensualist may have become a proud Pharisee, but in that character he is equally offensive to God. To be sanctified, then, you must cease from such vain struggles, as may arise from a conceit of your own strength, and begin with confessing your spiritual impotence.

The sacred scriptures are full and explicit in declaring man's inability. They every where teach us, that he cannot give a new and holy bias to his will, or produce within himself one right principle or affection. Such is our Lord's instruction, "Without me ye can do nothing *."

Those, who were most “exercised unto godliness,” and who attained the highest excellence, have made the strongest confessions of their weakness, and ascribed no efficacy to their own unassisted efforts. Such are their humble and devout acknowledgments: “Thou, Lord, hast wrought all our works in us:”—“We know that in us (that is, in our flesh) dwelleth no good thing:”—“But by the grace of God we are what we are:”—“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves: but our sufficiency is of God *.” Are there those in the present day, who consider this language as too humiliating, and refuse to adopt it? But do not these advocates for human ability practically confirm our doctrine, and refute their own positions? For, while they boast of their energies, what solid proofs of strength do they give? What fruits of righteousness do they produce? What evidence of internal sanctity do they exhibit? Are not their tempers and conduct a discredit to their system, as demonstrating a perpetual propensity to evil, which greatly preponderates, in defiance of all their pretended powers to do good?

But what the degenerate and corrupt nature of man cannot accomplish, the Lord God himself

* Isaiah xxvi. 12. Rom. vii. 18. 1 Cor. xv. 10.

2 Cor. iiii. 5.

effects. That sanctification is his own work, appears from his gracious promises and the tenor of the new covenant. For thus saith the Lord, “I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and will be their God, and they shall be my people:”—“Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you: A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh: And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them*.” Thus hath He “given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these we might be partakers of the divine nature†.” The conclusion is irresistible: We must look to God for the completion of his engagements, and depend upon his almighty agency, “to work in us both to will and to do.” He would not propose to us the assistance of his grace, unless it were absolutely needful: nor would He promise to do that for us, which we are competent to perform for ourselves.

That sanctification is the effect of a divine operation, appears also in this, that it is the object which the Lord Jesus had in view, and what He

* Jer. xxxi. 33. Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27. † 2 Peter i. 4.

has obtained for us by his death. In his merciful intercessions for his people, he entreats the Father for them, and declares it to be the grand cause for which he undertook his office, “that they might be sanctified through the truth*.” There were other important ends to be answered, when he laid down his life for them; but this was among the chief: “He loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it †.” On this ground we are required and expected to be holy, because he has made provision for the renovation of our nature: “He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works ‡.” If, however, we possess within ourselves the power of restoring the divine image upon our souls, then “Christ is dead in vain.” But while we are compelled to allow, that the work is too arduous for us, we are encouraged to believe, that God will bestow the blessing for Christ’s sake.

The prayers of the faithful, which in their general tenor are very similar, clearly evince not only their eager desires for the renovation of their souls in righteousness, but their entire dependence upon the grace of God for its

* John xvii. 17, 19.

† Eph. v. 25, 26.

‡ Titus ii. 14.

commencement, its progress, and its completion. Do they not all apply to “the author and giver of all good things,” under a consciousness of their own inability, that He would “graft in their hearts the love of his name, increase in them true religion, nourish them with all goodness, and of his great mercy keep them in the same*?” Is not this the language of their hearts, “Quicken me, O Lord, according to thy loving-kindness †?” In their charitable intercessions for their brethren, what do they ask, but that through the divine agency they may be “filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God;”—that “the Lord would make them to increase and abound in love, and establish their hearts unblameable in holiness;”—and that “the very God of peace would sanctify them wholly ‡?” What mean these petitions, unless God alone can recover his fallen creatures, and bring them back to a state of entire conformity to his own will?

Every thing good and excellent in man is represented by all the inspired writers as the fruit of the Holy Spirit, and directly ascribed to his operations. “The Spirit is life, because of righteousness:—and through the Spirit ye do mortify the deeds of the body.”—“His fruit is in all goodness, and

* Collect for the 7th Sunday after Trinity.

† Psalm cxix. 159.

‡ Phil. i. 11. 1 Thess. iii. 12, 13. v. 23.

righteousness, and truth:" and believers are "elect through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience *." What shall we say then, but devoutly acknowledge the efficacy of his grace, and give him the glory? "Of his own will begat He us:"—and now "with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord we are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord †." Let us no longer confide in our own resolutions, or take any credit to ourselves, for victory over sin, or for attainments in holiness. Let "the loftiness of man be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men made low, and the Lord alone be exalted" in our estimation ‡.

At the same time let us guard against an abuse of the truth. The doctrine of sovereign and almighty grace, exerted in the purification of our souls, while it checks presumption, should not encourage either indolence or despondency. The contrary effect should be produced. We would say with St. Paul, "Work out your own salvation, with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure §." The process of his operations in the heart is invisible and mysterious: but as in providence, so it is in grace; He is

* Rom. viii. 10, 13. Eph. v. 9. 1 Peter i. 2.

† James i. 18. 2 Cor. iii. 18.

‡ Isaiah ii. 17.

§ Phil. ii. 12, 13.

pleased to make use of subordinate and secondary causes, for the executing of his own purpose. We observe therefore

II. Sanctification is carried on by certain general means. It detracts not from the glory of God's sovereignty, nor is it inconsistent with the doctrine of his universal agency, that effects are produced by visible means, and that without those means the effects are rarely, if ever, experienced. Both the laws of nature, and the ordinances of grace, are established by himself, and are only the methods of his usual procedure. Thus he instructs us in our duty, and shews us in what way his blessing may be expected, encouraging our activity as well as our dependence. Among the instruments, which he condescends to employ for the gradual renovation of his people, we may reckon

1. The word of revelation. Our most devout and constant attention to it is demanded, and we are assured that it will be efficacious for the purpose we are considering, whether by private reading or by the public ministry. Its salutary influence upon the soul is compared to that of the rain upon the earth: for thus saith the Lord, "It shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it*." The

* Isaiah lv. 10, 11.

promise has been fulfilled in the universal experience of the church. How many can say with David, “Thy word hath quickened me*!” “Those that be planted in the house of the Lord,” (and such are they, who delight to listen to the declarations of his faithful ambassadors) “shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age: they shall be fat and flourishing†.” Accordingly the Saviour prays to the Father for his faithful people, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth‡.”

St. Paul commends the weeping elders of Ephesus “to God and to the word of his grace,” for this momentous reason that it was “able to build them up, and to give them an inheritance among all them which are sanctified§.” And St. Peter exhorts his brethren of the dispersion “as new-born babes to desire the sincere milk of the word, that they might grow thereby||.” Shall we not then most highly value that instrument, which God delights to honour, and, in a diligent attention to it, expect the influence and blessing of the Spirit, who gave it? By such a conduct we shall be guarded against the dangers of spiritual sloth and the fooleries of enthusiasm, while we are called to read, to hear, and to

* Psalm cxix. 50. † Psalm xcii. 13, 14. ‡ John xvii. 17.

§ Acts xx. 32.

|| 1 Peter ii. 2.

meditate upon, the holy scriptures, and give no credit to any pretensions of advancement in grace, but what those divine oracles justify. In this view we are taught to reverence

2. The Sacraments. These are what our Lord was pleased to institute, not only as the external badge of a christian profession, not only as the tokens of his love and the visible emblems of the gifts He bestows, but as the channels in which he is generally pleased to communicate those gifts to us. This indeed appears to be the very end of their appointment. Each of them is, as our church has well expressed it, “an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace given unto us, ordained by Christ himself, as a means whereby we receive the same, and a pledge to assure us thereof*.” By them therefore “He doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our faith in him †.”

Baptism is the initiating rite or mode of admission into the church, and is to be administered no more than once to the same person. But we believe that “hereby, as by an instrument, to them who receive it rightly, the promises of the forgiveness of sin, and of adoption to be the sons of God by the Holy Ghost, are visibly signed and sealed; faith is confirmed, and grace increased by virtue of prayer unto God ‡.”

* Catechism.

* Article xxv.

‡ Article xxvii.

“The supper of the Lord” is a standing ordinance, intended to be frequently repeated and perpetuated in the church, whereby we are to “shew the Lord’s death, till He come *.” “To such as rightly, worthily, and with faith receive the same, the bread which we break is a partaking of the body of Christ; and likewise the cup of blessing is a partaking of the blood of Christ †.” The benefits therefore to be derived from a devout celebration of this sacrament are “the strengthening and refreshing of our souls by the body and blood of Christ, as our bodies are by the bread and wine ‡.” How many can testify that they have returned from the Lord’s table with an increase of light and love, with a degree of vigour and consolation they had not known before! Is not this then an ordinance to be highly revered, and to be attended in lively faith and with joyful hope? Let us gladly embrace every opportunity of proving our regard to it, and encourage large expectations of the divine presence and blessing.

Among the principal means of progress in holiness, we must also reckon

3. Prayer. The advantage and necessity of this duty, for the purposes we are considering, seem most obviously to follow from the doctrine just laid down. For is it so, that sanctification

* 1 Cor. xi. 26.

† Article xxviii.

‡ Catechism.

must be ascribed to God as its author? Then surely all must allow, that to Him should our application be made, with the most ardent desires and importunate requests. He bestows the blessing freely; and not even to the most earnest petitioner on the ground of merit. But he will be solicited, that we may set the higher value on the gift, and the more thankfully acknowledge his goodness. Thus saith the Lord God, “I will yet for this be enquired of, to do it for them*.” The rule is absolute, “Ask, and it shall be given you:—He will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him†.”

And has not the promise been invariably fulfilled? Who are they that prosper in the divine life, receive abundant communications of grace, and “adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour,” but the devout supplicants, who maintain with constancy the habit of fervent prayer? They can all testify the truth of our positions, and say, with warmest gratitude to God, “In the day when I cried, Thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul‡.” But who shall wonder or complain, that they have not attained larger measures of holiness, that they are hindered in their progress, and are unprofitable in their generation, while they are too proud

* Ezek. xxxvi. 37.

† Luke xi. 9, 13.

‡ Psalm cxxxviii. 3.

or too careless to ask, and “restrain prayer before God?” Why are we so backward to the duty? Or why is the practice so frequently interrupted? Let us chide ourselves for our sad neglects; and, as ever we hope to make an honourable proficiency, “let us come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need*.”

For the furtherance of his own work in the hearts of his people, it pleases God to employ

4. The afflictive dispensations of providence. Why is it, that none of them are exempt from trouble? Or how are their trials to be considered as proofs of his kindness and fatherly affection? “For whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son, whom He receiveth.” Is not this a satisfactory reason?—“He correcteth us for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness†.” The Lord Jesus undertakes the sanctification of his redeemed, and He watches over and conducts the process with unremitting care and consummate skill. But it is carried on by means of operations as sharp as those of the furnace, in which the precious metals are refined. “He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness‡.”

* Heb. iv. 16.

† Heb. xii. 6, 10.

‡ Mal. iii. 3.

Afflictions do not of themselves, as by an inviolable and necessary law, sanctify the sufferers. For in many persons they seem to increase obduracy, and excite the most malignant affections. But when God makes use of them (and the instrument He retains in his own hands), they are effectual for the production of most extensive good. Under his influence they tend to awaken the careless sinner, to convince him of his guilt, and to humble his heart. They break his worldly schemes of happiness, and constrain him to chuse God for his portion, and to desire his favour as being better than life. They are calculated to subdue the various corruptions of his nature, pride, envy, covetousness, lust, and resentment. They endear the Saviour, who invites the "heavy-laden" to come unto him, that they may "find rest unto their souls." And by calling into exercise all spiritual affections, they prepare the soul for heaven.

Is not this the experience of all the faithful? Let us hear their testimony. "It is good for us, that we have been afflicted; that we might learn thy statutes."—"We therefore glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us."—"Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is

renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”—
 “Wherein we greatly rejoice, though now for a season (if need be) we are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of our faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ*.”

O shrink not then from the stroke, when you see the uplifted rod in your Father’s hand! Be sure, He means your best interest, and is taking the wisest and most effectual method to promote it. Your part is submission, humiliation, faith, and hope. Say from the heart, “It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth him good †.”

Finally, the progress of sanctification and a life of holiness depend upon the continued exercise of faith in Christ. “Look unto Jesus,” is the grand direction. What will be the effect, in the believer’s mind, of viewing Him upon the cross? Will it not do more than all uncommanded austerities, to mortify sin in the heart, and to excite a holy zeal in his service and for the glory of his name? That man has attained a considerable measure of real sanctity, and is in the

* Psalm cxix. 71. Rom. v. 3—5. 2 Cor. iv. 16, 17.

1 Peter i. 6, 7.

† 1 Sam. iii. 18.

way to make a still greater proficiency, who can say, “ I am crucified with Christ : nevertheless I live ; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me : and the life, which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me*.” He will be able to add, I feel such a sense of my obligations to Him, who died for me, that I will most gladly spend and be spent for Him:—for “ the love of Christ constraineth me †.”

The death of Christ is the procuring cause of all sanctifying grace ; and we shall receive communications of this grace, in proportion as we apply to him, and are enabled to maintain a principle of simple dependence upon him. “ Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ ‡.” For having “ ascended on high, and led captivity captive, He hath received gifts for men ; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them §.” Our great concern then is with Him. Let us regard him, as “ the author and finisher of our faith || :” and while we lie at the foot of his cross, imploring mercy, let our incessant cries ascend to him, as sitting on the throne of his glory, that He may “ make us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light ** :” and

* Gal. ii. 20.

† 2 Cor. v. 14.

‡ Eph. iv. 7.

§ Psalm lxxviii. 18.

|| Heb. xii. 2.

** Col. i. 12.

thus we shall undoubtedly be “sanctified by faith that is in Him *.”

But is he so regarded? Alas! how often is the eye of the believer turned off from him! Then faintness and weariness succeed, and temptations acquire fresh strength. In the world at large He is still altogether “despised and rejected of men.” Sin therefore triumphs, and maintains an extensive dominion. They, who hate him, cannot be holy, whatever be their systems, or however they may be restrained. Without his grace, they must remain destitute of all real excellence; they will go on to “fill the measure of their iniquities,” and become more and more “fitted for destruction.” Is there no friendly voice to warn them of their danger? Or will they not listen to the strong expostulations of Him, who calls to them, “How shall you escape, if you neglect so great salvation †?”

* Acts xxvi. 18.

† Heb. ii. 3.

ESSAY LVI.

ON THE ADVANTAGES OF SANCTIFICATION.

Men must be excited to seek after sanctification by the view of its advantages, which are these:—It displays the glory of God,—It is the principal means of doing good,—It is the source of strongest consolation,—It is the safest evidence of acceptance with God,—It is the best preparation for heaven.—But it will not expiate past guilt,—it does not constitute our title to heaven,—it furnishes no proper cause of glorying.

MEN are roused to action by motive. They will not pursue any object, or comply with any proposal, from which some supposed good is not expected to result. To spiritual things they manifest a natural aversion. They are not merely indifferent about the great blessing of sanctification, of which we are treating, they desire it not, they are unwilling even to accept it, they conceive it will be hostile to their interest, their reputation, or their happiness: they are afraid to be SAINTS. Both the name and the thing are odious.

We would therefore rescue the character from reproach, and conciliate a favourable attention to it.

Let us form our judgment from the decisions of true wisdom, from the unerring standard of the divine word, and not from the rash opinion of a thoughtless world. The heavenly preacher, "the faithful and true witness," has pronounced his infallible sentence: "Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God *." The righteous Lord requires, that we be cleansed "in the inward parts" from our natural defilement; and without this internal sanctity we possess no true religion. Happy they, who have attained it! There is no higher privilege, which he can bestow upon them here; for by virtue of it they shall have communion with him upon earth, and it is an assurance to them that they shall behold him in his glory. Is there any honour or felicity to be compared with it? It is the most excellent gift, which the grace of God communicates, and the very end for which all others are imparted. Its advantages are indeed incalculable; but there are some considerations, which may increase the ardour of our desires for "the sanctification of the Spirit."

I. It displays the glory of God. This is an argument, which the selfish man will totally

* Matt. v. 8.

disregard, but it will have great weight with the true believer. It is on this ground therefore, that Christians are required to labour after increasing measures of holiness, and urged to continual circumspection, strenuous activity, and patient perseverance in all the various duties of their calling. So speaks our Lord to his followers, “ Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven : and “ Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit ; so shall ye be my disciples *.” So prays St. Paul for the Philippian converts, that they may be “ filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God †.” How forcible is the consideration, far beyond their own individual concerns, in the estimation of all those who love the Lord in sincerity and truth,—that they shall be “ a people for his name !”

Is it enquired, “ How can the honour of God be promoted by the holiness of his servants ? It is obvious, that in this way He manifests his own character. While they are renewed in righteousness, He shews his mighty power, which in no other operations of his hands is more clearly exhibited, than in subduing rebellious sinners to obedience. His FAITHFULNESS is evinced in bestowing upon those, who seek him,

* Matt. v. 16. John xv. 8.

† Phil. i. 11.

the spiritual blessings which he has promised, the sanctifying influences of the Holy Ghost, His **MERCY** shines forth in brightest colours, compassionating our wretched condition, and most effectually repairing the ruins of the fall, by restoring the divine image to the soul, which had become so degraded by sin. His own essential **PURITY**, which might seem to be obscured by the abundance of his grace, is now confirmed beyond a doubt, and commended to our admiration, while it appears that he pardons none, whom he does not also sanctify, and holds no fellowship with those, who do not “walk in the light, as He is in the light *.” Thus he prevents that foul reproach, which would otherwise be cast upon his character, that he can look on iniquity without abhorrence, and that “Christ is the minister of sin:” and he gets himself honour by exhibiting in his people a real, though yet unfinished and faint, resemblance of his own righteous character.

Will you not examine, Do you bear his likeness? Is “the beauty of the Lord our God upon you?” Do you “shew forth his praise?” Or do you feel any solicitude, that by your “good conversation in Christ” His truth may be vindicated, and others may be brought to admire, and love, and serve him? Alas! what dishonour is

* 1 John i. 6, 7.

brought upon his name; and how is the progress of his gospel obstructed, by the unholy tempers and open misconduct of insincere and careless professors!

II. It is the principal means of doing good in the world. Christians, according to the dispositions of their new nature, desire to be useful in their generation, and account it their privilege and happiness to be so. Useful indeed they must be, though in different ways and measures. Under the influence of divine grace purifying their hearts, they will possess such principles, and be excited to such exertions, as will render them a blessing in their families and churches, in the town and nation which they inhabit.

They will endeavour to alleviate the distresses of their fellow-creatures by plans of disinterested and extended benevolence. They will be "ready to distribute, willing to communicate." They are "the liberal, who devise liberal things." For LOVE is one main branch, or rather it is the essence, of sanctification: and how great will be its energies, and how valuable its effects, in society! It will seek the peace and welfare of all, though it may feel a peculiar attachment to those, who possess a kindred spirit. It will make large sacrifices, and patiently endure severe hardships, for the prevention or removal of calamities, or, if that cannot be, for their alleviation. It will also excite its professors to fervent and unceasing

prayer for the averting of divine judgments. When it sees the sword drawn, and ready to take vengeance on a guilty land, it will deprecate its effects, and will often prevail for the remission or delay of the sentence. Thus the saints of God diffuse blessings around them, and form the strongest bulwark of a nation. O that God would multiply their numbers, and increase their activity and zeal among ourselves!

They will exert their strength and influence in opposition to sin. They look on it with grief and abhorrence, in proportion to their measure of sanctification. They will therefore anxiously enquire, what can be done to check its progress; and they will set themselves with vigour to the work. It is a noble object: how can they more effectually serve their generation! The present state of the world, and of our own country, affords a wide scope for the exercise of this principle. But much more tremendous would be the triumphs and the desolations of iniquity, if the few righteous were removed from among us. They do much, though they lament the inefficacy of their labours. They restrain men, at least, from being as abandoned as they would be. Their very presence and their example will frequently ashame and confound the most audacious sinners, and for a time prevent the execution of their plans. Let them be consistent and honourable in their conduct, and then they should stand

forwards with faithfulness and courage to stem the torrent of prevailing wickedness, in their respective circles, and according to their talents. They should reprove and admonish, instruct and warn, and, where they possess authority, punish offenders. Who else shall “make up the hedge, or stand in the gap*?” From them alone we look for effectual reformation.

But they extend their views beyond the present life; and therefore they will labour not merely to restrain and civilize, but to convert and save sinners. Not satisfied that their domestics, relatives, and acquaintance, are decent and respectable members of society, they will be anxious for their future and everlasting state. They will therefore seize every favourable opportunity of testifying to them the grace of Jesus, and commending the gospel to their cordial acceptance. To their pious counsels they will add their fervent prayers, by which they may hope to prevail for the salvation of some, who “are ready to perish.” This is an enlarged kind of usefulness, the good effects of which, in number, magnitude, and duration, are past all calculation. It has been an everlasting blessing to many thousands, that they were connected with those who know and love the Lord. “They that dwell under their shadow shall return:”—and “from

* Ezek. xxii. 30.

them that believe, as the scripture hath said, shall flow rivers of living water*." They strengthen the hands, and give efficacy to the labours, of faithful ministers. The benefit of their exertions may extend to remotest generations and throughout eternity. Can there be a greater encouragement? "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins†." Such effects as these we do not look for from any but real Christians, living under the influence of his Spirit. Men of talent and benevolence without holiness may be useful in certain ways: but shall we say, that they are a blessing to the world or to the church upon the whole, when their example and conversation are of a mischievous tendency, and do immense harm to the souls of their fellow-creatures?

III. It is the source of strongest consolation. It was sin, which first introduced misery; and misery is now invariably attendant upon sin, not only as a just punishment from God, but as its necessary effect. Pride, lust, covetousness, envy, malice, and revenge, must make men wretched in themselves: and the removal of these vile affections will consequently take away one of the

* Hosea xiv. 7. John vii. 38.

† James v. 19, 20.

greatest obstructions to their happiness. Purity of heart, or sanctification, stills the violence of the tempest, which once raged in the breast, and produces a sweet calm. “ Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance *;—these are “ the fruits of the Spirit,” and, as far as they prevail, they secure tranquillity and comfort to the mind. Whatever outward events may take place, the man, who possesses these holy tempers, cannot be very unhappy: whilst he blesses others, he will be blessed also himself.

But happiness depends upon a sense of the favour of God. And who are they, who may expect this high enjoyment, but those who are renewed by the Spirit and walk in righteousness before Him? For thus runs the promise of Jesus Christ, “ If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him †.” From such gracious visitants and inhabitants what divine refreshments and consolations flow into the soul! But the privilege is inseparably connected with holiness. “ If we say that we have fellowship with God, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of

* Gal. v. 22, 23.

† John xiv. 23.

Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin *.” Do you say then to this holy Lord God, “When wilt thou come unto me?” you must add, “I will walk within my house with a perfect heart:”—for “Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness,—those that remember Thee in thy ways †.” We remark throughout all the scriptures, that the presence of Jehovah and the manifestations of his love are promised only to those, who are “created in Christ Jesus unto good works:” and these constitute bliss the most rapturous and inconceivable. They are the foretaste and the very beginning of heaven. What have we known of this peculiar enjoyment? Are we happy in God? What prevents the union? Is it not the prevalence of some corrupt principle or affection? Is it not the absence of sanctification?

IV. It is the safest evidence of acceptance with God, and of the reality of divine grace in the soul. How desirable is it to possess some solid criterion of true religion, some clear test of our spiritual state, which may be confidently relied on! Now the holiness, of which we speak, if properly understood and appealed to, will furnish us with such a mark. Let it not be fixed too high; let not any be unchristianized, merely because they have not attained absolute perfection,

* 1 John i. 5, 7.

† Psal. ci, 2. Isaiah lxiv. 5.

or even an eminent degree of sanctification: but let those only be acknowledged as believers, who produce such fruits as invariably result from internal purity. The substance of this grace is the same in all, though they may differ widely in the measures of their advancement. They are all of one heart and one mind, in abhorring sin of whatever kind it be, and in utterly renouncing its practice; in loving God supremely, and delighting in his law; in ardently desiring to be conformed to his righteous will, and in directing their plans and pursuits to his glory. These are indispensable requisites in the christian character: they are the essence of sanctification, and are infallible signs of an union with Christ. Many other marks have been set up, which are false or doubtful, not therefore to be trusted without extreme hazard; but these cannot deceive: they are dispositions, which the divine Spirit only can produce; and, as they come from God, they prove that the possessors are his children.

May we not fear, that many deceive themselves in judging of their own state? There are those, who rashly presume upon their acceptance with God, and even boast of their high attainments in religion, only because they can nicely discriminate between different theological systems, debate with fluency and zeal, or occasionally feel certain rapturous affections in devotional duties. This

may be the case, where there is no conscientious, practical regard to the will of God. Their confidence and joy therefore are delusive. They cry "Peace, peace;" but there is no peace. O let us seek for clearer and more decided evidence of our safety! Let us not be satisfied without an increasing hatred of sin and dominion over it, without larger measures of grace subduing the tempers of our mind to the holy law and sovereign authority of God. Shall we wish to supersede or alter the apostolical rule of discriminating characters? "Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous: he that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for His seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness, is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother *." Who among us can stand the test of such a scrutiny? Do we not shrink from the examination?

V. It is the best preparation for heaven. None, who are truly sanctified by divine grace, shall

* 1 John iii. 7—10.

finally perish. The desires implanted in their hearts shall not be disappointed: and nothing short of the full and everlasting enjoyment of God will satisfy them. "They hunger and thirst after righteousness, and they shall be filled." They are "the pure in heart, who shall see God*." They possess "the first-fruits of the Spirit," and these are a pledge and an earnest that they shall receive the whole: they are even a part of that holiness and felicity, which await them in the great harvest. "Whom He called, them He also justified; and whom He justified, them He also glorified†." They may therefore encourage and animate each other with the blissful expectation: "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear, what we shall be: but we know, that when He shall appear we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is‡."

Sanctification is a state of mind, which must begin on earth, and without it, as we shall afterwards prove, there can be no admission into heaven. Believers, being "dead unto sin, and alive unto God," should "give thanks unto the Father, WHO HATH MADE THEM MEET to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light:" through the transforming influence of the Spirit, they possess the image of the Lord

* Matt. v. 6, 8.

† Rom. viii. 30.

‡ 1 John iii. 2.

Jesus; and “CHRIST IN THEM is the hope of glory *.” They are also growing in fitness and preparation for the employment and society of the celestial world, by the cultivation of holy tempers and of a devotional intercourse with God. “Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, they press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus:—for their conversation is in heaven, from whence also they look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ †.” They will likewise be happy hereafter, in different degrees according to their present spiritual advancement. This is a deep and mysterious subject; but it is clearly revealed, that the future blessedness of the faithful, though bestowed freely, will be proportioned to their holiness. “They shall be recompensed at the resurrection of the just:—For the Lord God will render to every man according to his deeds:—He which soweth sparingly, shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully, shall reap also bountifully ‡.” There will be no defect of glory or blessedness in any of “the vessels of mercy,” but it should seem they will consist of different capacities. Yet they are all such, as the Lord himself “afore prepares unto glory:” for “unto

* Col. i. 12, 27.

† Phil. i. 13, 14, 20.

‡ Luke xiv. 14. Rom. ii. 6. 2 Cor. ix. 6.

every one of them is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ*.”

Are not these considerations of sufficient weight, to excite men to follow after holiness? What stronger motives can be urged? Who then shall neglect the necessary preparation, or be indifferent about their prospects in the eternal world? Or who, after such a view of the subject, will contemptuously reproach “the saints of God” as fools and madmen? O “be ye not mockers, lest your bands be made strong†!” They are acting the wisest part, as you yourselves will soon perceive and confess: for by that very conduct, for which they are reviled, they most effectually secure their present and everlasting happiness. But upon this point there are important cautions to be suggested: for the truth is liable to be abused, even on opposite grounds. We remark therefore, however excellent be the grace of sanctification,

1. It will not expiate our past guilt. We fear, that such a presumptuous expectation is sometimes entertained. But to suppose, that former transgressions may be atoned for by any subsequent personal obedience of the sinner, is to confound the order of things, or rather, to subvert the whole system of Christianity. We can never be too careful in preserving this clear

* Rom. ix. 23. Eph. iv. 7.

† Isaiah xxviii. 22.

distinction, that the blood shed for us, not the holiness wrought in us, will procure our remission and acceptance.

2. It does not constitute our title to heaven. The Lord Jesus Christ, and his righteousness alone, are the ground of our hope and confidence, that we shall obtain “an entrance into the everlasting kingdom.” We cannot be admitted otherwise than as justified in Him. It is said indeed, “Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have RIGHT to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city *.” But “to do his commandments” we must believe in him: and our obedience gives us no claim on the score of merit; it shews our “RIGHT,” only as an evidence of our faith and union with Christ.

3. It furnishes no proper cause of glorying in any one respect. Whatever be our sanctity, we cannot demand a reward, as if we had fulfilled the law. It is not more than our bounden duty requires; it comes far short of that standard; nor is any part of it from ourselves. It is obstructed by our perverse opposition; it is defiled by the corrupt affections of our nature, which in one way or another mix with every service we perform. We would say then to the most eminent believer, “Who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou, that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as

if thou hadst not received it *?" O praise God, who hath visited you with his loving-kindness, and hath bestowed upon you so excellent a gift! Otherwise you also must have perished in your sins. Thus while those, "who are lost," must take the whole blame to themselves for their guilt and condemnation, "the redeemed of the Lord" must ascribe all their holiness, and every other part of their salvation, to God in Christ Jesus.

* 1 Cor. iv. 7.

ESSAY LVII.

ON THE NECESSITY OF SANCTIFICATION.

Sanctification is not only highly advantageous, but indispensably requisite. Its necessity appears,—from the holy nature of God,—from the declared purpose of his counsels,—from the divine commands,—from the work and offices of Christ,—from the nature of the Christian life,—and from the descriptions given of future blessedness.

THE dread of suffering will sometimes rouse men to action, where the prospect of enjoyment fails. Sanctification, it has been proved, will promote their best happiness and highest interest: but that consideration, it should seem, is not sufficient to excite them to pursue or desire it with ardour and perseverance. They will treat it with indifference and contempt. We must therefore press upon them another argument, the absolute necessity of that Holiness, which they presumptuously neglect and despise, “WITHOUT WHICH NO MAN SHALL SEE THE LORD *.”

* Heb. xii. 14.

This declaration, which proceeds from an authority not to be disputed, is strong, clear, decisive, and alarming. We cannot doubt its meaning; it denounces the most tremendous misery; it admits of no subterfuge. If we shall not “see the Lord,” whither shall we be driven? In what place, and in what society, must we take up our final abode? The answer is obvious. But is there no exception? May not something else be substituted in the room of this internal purity, however advantageous it may be? May not some plea be urged in favour of certain individuals, to prevent the execution of the sentence? No: the Lord God, the righteous Judge, has determined, and the sentence is irreversible; “Without holiness NO MAN shall see the Lord.” May a conviction of this truth produce a deep and lasting impression upon our hearts! May God excite in us a holy fear, a constant jealousy over ourselves, an importunity in prayer, and an unremitting attention to every duty! Let us be aware, that we must receive the blessing, not from our exertions however strenuous, but from his grace, and “through the blood of the everlasting covenant.” —“The very God of peace sanctify us wholly!”

Its necessity will appear from the following considerations:

I. From the holy nature of God. We should be aware what his real character is, or else we shall deceive ourselves by false and presumptuous

hopes. He cannot deny himself, or be induced to act in direct opposition to any one of his attributes: He cannot therefore save sinners, but in a way perfectly consistent with his holiness. Accordingly, those whom He pardons, He also sanctifies: He could not otherwise maintain any intercourse with them. This is every where assigned as one principal reason, for which he requires them who draw near to him to be conformed to his image in righteousness. Thus He speaks, “I am the Lord your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy*.” On this ground the prophet remonstrates with him for seeming to shew favour to ungodly men; “Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity†.” An apostle makes the proper application of this truth in his exhortation to the faithful, “As He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation, because it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy‡.” And on the same principle the venerable Joshua warns and reproves the wavering tribes of Israel, “Ye cannot serve the Lord, for He is an holy God: He is a jealous God, He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins§.”

* Lev. xi. 44.

† Habak. i. 13.

‡ 1 Peter i. 15, 16.

§ Josh. xxiv. 19.

How solemn are those denunciations! how tremendous to such as are yet carnal! O consider, with what a God you have to do! He cannot give you a licence to sin. You must be renewed after his likeness, before he can admit you into his presence, or into a state of communion with him. You must possess a similarity of mind, so as to love what He loves: for how “can two walk together, except they be agreed*?” Do you manifest such a resemblance? Do you not rather wish to bring down the divine perfections to your own standard? To you therefore Jehovah addresses that reproof, which is so full of terror, “Thou thoughtest wickedly, that I am even such a one as thyself; but I will reprove thee, and set before thee the things that thou hast done †.”

II. From the declared purpose of his counsels. In the mysterious plan of redemption, which he formed from eternity, one considerable object was the sanctification of his people. This is his gracious design, and it cannot be frustrated. “According as He hath chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy, and without blame before him in love ‡.” Believers are “called to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ;” but the means are as expressly appointed, and are therefore as

* Amos iii. 3.

† Psalm l. 21, old trans.

‡ Eph. i. 4.

indispensably necessary, as the end. In this view they are reminded of their obligations, “because God hath from the beginning chosen them to salvation THROUGH SANCTIFICATION OF THE SPIRIT and belief of the truth *.”

Shall we then presume to set aside, or consider as useless, that which the Lord God in his immutable counsel hath ordained, as the only method of training up his children for heaven? Or to what evidence shall we trust, that “it is his good pleasure to give us the kingdom,” if we be entirely destitute of purity of heart? It is written, “The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His:” but it is added, “Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity †.”—“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure:—adding to your faith virtue ‡.” Here we see the proper use and salutary tendency of the doctrine of God’s sovereign and free grace in Christ Jesus. Such an application of it contains the best answer to the objections commonly urged against it. It is not for us to read the names of individuals, “who are written in the Lamb’s book of life:” we must look, not to the divine decree, which is necessarily concealed from our view, but to the fruits and evidences of grace, resulting from

* 2 Thess. ii. 13, 14.

† 2 Tim. ii. 19.

‡ 2 Peter i. 5—10.

it, and thus manifestly declaring it. Are not the interests of holiness hereby secured? Is not its necessity clearly ascertained? Such is the representation of the Church of England: “Those, whom God hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, be called according to his purpose by his Spirit working in due season: they through grace obey the calling:—they be made like the image of his only-begotten Son Jesus Christ: they WALK RELIGIOUSLY IN GOOD WORKS, and at length, by God’s mercy, they attain to everlasting felicity*.”

III. From the divine commands. The Lord has every where, in all the scriptures, required his people to be holy: and is not his authority to be regarded? Will he revoke his own statutes, or suffer them to be violated with impunity? The gospel itself, though it be a proclamation of mercy, abounds with precepts. It does not establish obedience as the foundation of our hope, or ascribe our justification to any degree of sanctity: but it enforces upon all believers a constant attention to every duty, and declares that even in this dispensation of grace he only “that doeth righteousness is righteous†.” It enjoins an unreserved submission to the Saviour, as to our Lawgiver and our King. Thus He himself addresses us, “If ye love me, keep my commandments.

* Art. xvii.

† 1 John iii. 7.

He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me.—Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you *.” His beloved apostle also, jealous for the honour of his Master, strenuously insists on this holy subjection to Him, and exposes the vain pretensions of those who refuse it:—“He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him †.”

To what then does this obedience amount? Does it relax any of our moral obligations? Does it allow of any habitual or wilful departure from righteousness? Or is it possible for fallen man to render, or even to desire and aim at, such obedience, without the sanctification of the Spirit? Have we understood the nature and extent of the religion we profess? Or shall we maintain, that we may with perfect safety yield ourselves to the dominion of our unsanctified tempers, in opposition to those divine injunctions, which call for, not a mere external decency, but purity of heart? Abhorred be such doctrine!—We deduce the same inferences

IV. From the work and offices of Christ. For advert only to the grand design of his undertaking, and you will perceive that he had in view the perfect deliverance of his people from sin. “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested,

* John xiv. 15, 21. xv. 14.

† 1 John ii. 4.

that he might destroy the works of the devil *.” He appeared as a Prophet to instruct, and all his teaching accorded with this declared intention of his incarnation: for thus he speaks, “Who-soever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven †.” As our great High Priest, He offered up himself a sacrifice to God: and the object which he proposed, was not only to exempt us from punishment, but to “purify us unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works ‡.” Such therefore is the efficacy of his blood, where it is applied by faith, it “purges our conscience from dead works, to serve the living God §.”

He has returned to heaven, and there he reigns in glory as our Head and King; but he is still mindful of his charge upon earth: and to this end he dwells and rules in the hearts of his redeemed, that by the power of his grace he may bring them to a state of more pure and entire subjection. “If Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life, because of righteousness ||.” He will come again, and bring his people with him. But who are they,

* 1 John iii. 8.

† Matt. v. 19.

‡ Titus ii. 14.

§ Heb. ix. 14.

|| Rom. viii. 10.

that shall then share his triumph, and inherit his kingdom? He will present to himself every member of his church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but holy and without blemish*. From every representation of the salvation of Christ, it is obvious that those, who are not renewed unto holiness, have derived no real benefit from him, nor is the design of his mediation answered in them. Let us no longer be content with calling him our Lord and Master, but pray that his whole work of purification may be accomplished in us. The necessity of this will also appear,

V. From the nature of the christian life. No enquiry can be more interesting to those, who wish to adorn their religious profession, than what we now propose: To what are we called by the gospel? Is it not to holiness†? What then should be our object? What is our main business and employment? Not empty speculation, or curious debates in theology, but our own spiritual progress, and the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom. In order to these ends, we must be continually resisting the motions of the flesh, or the workings of our corrupt nature "striving for the mastery:" we must "keep under the body, and bring it into subjection." Every depraved affection must be vigorously

* Eph. v. 27.

† 1 Thess. iv. 7.

opposed and effectually subdued, though it should cost us as much as to pluck out a right eye, or to cut off a right hand. What is this, but to labour after holiness?

It is our high privilege to “walk with God.” This intercourse will produce unutterable consolation: but how much is necessary to maintain it! What vigilance and assiduity, what self-denial, what abstraction from the world, what spirituality of mind! For if by remissness in duty or sensual indulgence we “grieve the holy Spirit of God,” our access to the throne of grace will be obstructed, the Lord will hide his face, and “Satan will get an advantage of us.” To have fellowship with God, then, we must “walk in the light, as He is in the light*.”

We are intrusted with various talents, which we are required to occupy and improve, in plans of benevolence and piety for the benefit of our brethren and the promotion of our Master’s glory. But if it be, as it ought, our daily study and delight, to do good in our place and generation, and to “hold forth the word of life;” the selfish, malignant, and carnal affections must be subdued, and “all things belonging to the Spirit must live and grow in us:” in other words, we must die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.

We are strangers and pilgrims upon the earth,

* 1 John i. 7.

and we should be solicitous to “pass the time of our sojourning here” consistently with that character. “Having then no continuing city here, we seek one to come.” What an arduous work lies before us! We must “prepare to meet our God,” sitting loose to every thing below, ready “to depart and to be with Christ.” “Our conversation must be in heaven, from whence also we must be looking for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ*.” Are these the habits or attainments of unsanctified persons? Or are they not peculiar to those, who are “renewed in the spirit of their minds?” What do we know, or what do we manifest of this vital, practical religion? For this only is to be accounted genuine Christianity.

The necessity of this internal purity follows likewise,

VI. From the descriptions which are given of future blessedness. Men entertain strange and gross ideas of heaven, as if it were a Mahometan Paradise, affording sensual delights, and a free admission even to the most unholy. But every consideration of it, according to the scripture account, will convince us that its felicities are of a more excellent sort, and that none can possibly partake of them without a previous preparation of mind. How unsuitable to the taste of the

* Phil. iii. 20.

carnal would be the society of saints and angels! How intolerable the presence of the Holy Lord God Almighty! Or how could they, whose hearts are "enmity against God," bear to be employed throughout eternity in what will for ever occupy the blessed, contemplating, admiring, and praising Jehovah! The happiness itself consists not of sensual joys, for which alone the unconverted possess any capacity; but it is altogether spiritual: it is to see God, as He is,—to be for ever with Him, swallowed up in the enjoyment of his love,—to be like Him, being perfectly conformed to his image, bearing the impress of his holiness!

This is a fruition absolutely incompatible with the prevailing dispositions of an unsanctified mind. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord:" "the pure in heart" alone can taste of that "fulness of joy" which is "in his presence," and drink of those "pleasures, which are at his right hand for evermore." "There is no peace to the wicked" even here, much less can there be hereafter, when all their vile affections, their hatred of God and of one another, will be let loose and reign without control. Wherever they may be placed, they have those sources of wretchedness within themselves, which will torture them for ever. The immediate presence of Jehovah, the company of saints and angels, the rapturous songs of the blessed, would not alleviate but

increase their anguish, and fill them with aggravated horror.

On all these accounts the sanctification of the soul being so indispensably requisite, the professed disciples of Jesus Christ should be directed to fix their most earnest attention upon it. To this they are called, and this they should follow after, with unremitting ardour, firmly resisting all difficulties and opposition. "Holiness unto the Lord" should be inscribed on all their possessions and transactions. It should be exhibited in all their various stations, characters, and offices, in all places and employments, in the shop, the field, and the family, as well as in the church and the closet.

Will not such consistent and exemplary sanctity prevent or effectually silence objections against christian doctrines? Will it be urged, that the peculiar principles of the gospel are favourable to licentiousness, while those who maintain them strenuously insist on the necessity of an uniform regard to duty, and even of internal purity? At least "with well-doing they will put to silence the ignorance of foolish men*." Hypocrites there are under an evangelical profession: and this subject, more than any other, will tend to detect and expose them. Let them not be vindicated or acknowledged for the friends of Christ, while by their loose and disorderly lives or wicked

* 1 Peter ii. 15.

tempers they are making Him appear as “the minister of sin.”

Will any give the least serious attention to this subject, and determine to continue unholy? Will any readers turn from the consideration, with perfect indifference whether they shall be sanctified or not? Will you lay down the book without one fervent prayer or desire to be purified from sin, and again pursue your plans of dissipation and folly? Will you indulge and cherish all carnal affections, and seek your happiness in sensual enjoyments? Be persuaded to pause for a moment, and enquire where you are to dwell for ever. For what society, and for what employment, will you be qualified, in the future world? “To be carnally minded is death:”—and therefore “if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die.” Though “God endure with much long-suffering,” He declares you are “the vessels of wrath FITTED TO DESTRUCTION,” to which you will be consigned by His just and irreversible judgment*.

* Rom. viii. 6, 13. ix. 22.

ESSAY LVIII.

ON CHRISTIAN OBEDIENCE.

Christians are discriminated by their obedience. To ascertain of what sort this obedience is, consider—the persons, by whom it is performed,—its rule,—its measure,—its principles,—and the happy effects resulting from it.

REAL Christians are distinguished in the sacred scriptures by various marks and appellations. St. Peter, congratulating them on their high privileges, and thence deducing their obligations to duty, describes them as “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father,” inasmuch as He not only foresaw but ordered every minute circumstance concerning them, and whatever they possess or look for they owe to His free choice and sovereign grace. But his appointment of them to salvation is consistent with holiness, nay, is designed to promote it. The apostle therefore reminds them, that their destination to heaven, for which there must be a previous preparation, is
“THROUGH SANCTIFICATION OF THE SPIRIT.”

This, as we have seen, is the inward work of God upon the soul, which will be evidenced as far as opportunity is given, by a course of devout and exemplary conduct. It is accordingly declared to be "UNTO OBEDIENCE*," necessary to produce that effect, and intended for that very purpose. OBEDIENCE being the result and design of the whole process of grace, none are to be accounted "heirs of salvation," but those who are taught and enabled to yield themselves with unfeigned subjection to God.

A subject this of peculiar importance, and it now comes before us in due order, in the consideration of our theological system. The inspired writers continually insist on it, as always consequent upon a sincere reception of the gospel, and springing from a lively faith. Believers therefore are addressed as "obedient children," or "the servants of obedience unto righteousness;" and the gospel is said to be "made known to all nations for the obedience of faith,"—"casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ †."

It is of the greater consequence that we clearly ascertain the nature of CHRISTIAN OBEDIENCE,

* 1 Peter i. 2.

† 1 Peter i. 14. Rom. vi. 16. xvi. 26. 2 Cor. x. 5.

which forms an essential part of our religion, because by many it has been grossly misrepresented. There are those, who have spoken of it in such terms, as if it might be produced by our own strenuous endeavours, or by some innate goodness we possess, not being aware, it should seem, that fallen man in his carnal state is incapable of it without a change. Others again too highly extol it, and place their dependence upon it, as if it were perfect and meritorious, a full and adequate performance of all that the divine law requires, entitling them to the favour and to the kingdom of God. At the same time we lament, that some zealous pretenders to an acuteness of discernment in evangelical truth, dislike the very mention of obedience; they discard it, as if it were unnecessary, or rather derogatory to the honour of Christ; they discourage all serious efforts to attain it as fruitless and conceited, the offspring of pride, and the sure mark of a most dangerous presumption.

In opposition to these mistakes, both on the one side and the other, let us endeavour to state of what sort that obedience is, which we are instructed to look for in real Christians, and which divine grace will produce in them, though it may be in different degrees. Consider

I. The persons, by whom it is performed. We speak not now of the obedience of angels, or even of that of Adam before his fall (in which

no defect or intermission appeared); but of that of sinners, restored indeed, yet for the present not perfected. This therefore cannot be complete. It must be the obedience of PENITENTS, who abhor sin, and most cordially desire deliverance from it. The foundation of it must be laid in repentance and conversion; for every carnal man is a rebel against his Maker; he is “not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be*.” The very first act of genuine obedience is to return to God, ashamed of opposing him, and determined henceforth to submit implicitly to his will, saying from the heart, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” The rebel thus subdued will become a faithful and diligent servant, and from attachment to his Master will undertake the most arduous work, and make the most painful sacrifice, which may be required.

It is also the obedience of BELIEVERS, being essentially connected with, and invariably produced by, faith in Jesus Christ. Thus our Lord declares, that his redeemed people are “sanctified by faith that is in Him†.” St. Paul, instructed by his divine Master, insists that the “charity,” which is “the end of the commandment,” proceeds “out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned‡;” and directs Titus to “affirm constantly, that they

* Rom. viii. 7.

† Acts xxvi. 18.

‡ 1 Tim. i. 5.

which have believed in God" (the exhortation would be lost upon others) "might be careful to maintain good works*." Men of this description alone are qualified to act from right principles; they alone feel the constraining influence of LOVE, without which nothing can be pleasing to the Lord. They have so deep a sense of the obligations conferred upon them, that their whole lives devoted to God's service seem but a poor acknowledgment: and after their utmost exertions and attainments, they disclaim all pretensions to merit. Their goodness therefore is not mercenary or constrained; and no other obedience (if any other were possible), but that which is disinterested and cheerful, can be at all acceptable to that God, who demands the affections of the heart.

Do not many deceive themselves with a vain confidence of their own goodness? Be persuaded to examine, whether you have sufficient grounds for concluding that God is pleased with your services? To resolve that question, it will be necessary for you to ascertain what is your real character. Are you penitents? Are you believers in Christ? No others can do "works pleasant to God †." Your first object therefore should be, to be satisfied that your state is good, and then to conduct yourselves consistently and honourably in your profession of the gospel. Consider

* Titus iii. 8.

† Article xiii.

II. The rule of christian obedience. We are not fulfilling our duty to God by pursuing our own fancies, or by a servile compliance with any systems or devices of men. They may lead us to much superstition and irreligion; and yet in many cases, and to a certain extent, an observance of human regulations may be expedient, or even necessary. But the obedience, into the nature of which we are enquiring, is an unfeigned and active regard to the will of God, in whatever way made known. The gospel requires, that the whole man be unreservedly subjected to Him. His authority must be cheerfully submitted to, and what he has commanded we must proceed to execute with all our vigour.

This obedience, then, embraces the whole of the preceptive part of revelation, which is clearly addressed to us. It must be universal, not excepting any one express injunction; for whatever the Lord God hath enacted, must be excellent in itself, and necessary to be observed. The partiality of those, who will obey in some things, not in all, is a decisive proof of their hypocrisy. If any one point of duty be habitually and systematically violated, the authority of God is as certainly despised, as if his law were rejected altogether. We conclude with the apostle, "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him*."

* 1 John ii. 4.

A system of commutation seems to be adopted and trusted in by some ; as if they might substitute one duty for another, or as if a righteous act might be set against a transgression. What is this, but to subvert the very foundation of God's government, by making his precepts bend to our inclinations or convenience? He is not so to be mocked or insulted.

Let us institute an impartial examination of ourselves, upon a clear view of the full extent of our obligations. On such an enquiry, we shall be compelled to abandon all our proud boastings: we shall cease to be satisfied with our best attainments ; nor shall we so fatally impose upon ourselves, as to imagine that we are good, merely because there are some offences, of which we are not guilty. Consider

III. The measure of obedience. Imperfection remains, and will during this life remain, even in those who are redeemed and sanctified. Many and deplorable defects attach to their best performances. The doctrine of the Church of Rome, concerning " works of supererogation, cannot be taught without arrogancy and impiety. For by them men do declare, That they do not only render unto God as much as they are bound to do, but that they do more for his sake than of bounden duty is required: whereas Christ saith plainly, When ye have done all that are

commanded to you, say, We are unprofitable servants *.”

But while all the faithful are ready to acknowledge their continual failures, and utter unworthiness, they allow not, they approve not, the least omission or interruption of duty. They desire that every faculty should be in subjection to God, and actively employed in his service. The inner as well as the outward man should be so devoted, so occupied: “the inward parts,” or the affections of the mind, should in the first place be engaged “on the Lord’s side,” and all their vigour be exerted in doing his work. This He requires, “My son, give me thy heart †.” And without this the most splendid appearances of morality and piety are deceitful and vain. Will He, who searcheth the heart and trieth the reins, be pleased with the most costly sacrifices or strenuous efforts, with all the external forms of decency or devotion, where there is an habitual and prevailing enmity against his character, law, or government? O beware, how you rest in an outside shew! For very frequently “That which is highly esteemed amongst men, is abomination in the sight of God ‡.”

Christian obedience admits not of any allowed suspension or remission. It is not a plan of

* Article xiv.

† Prov. xxiii. 26.

‡ Luke xvi. 15.

temporary exertion, or of a strictness to be practised merely for a day, or for a season of peculiar abstemiousness. It proceeds from an abiding principle; and, though it meets with many obstructions, it may be described as uniform and constant, progressive and persevering. This account sufficiently distinguishes it from the zealous efforts of hypocrites, who under the sudden impulse of their passions may “do many things*,” may take up a system of religious conduct, which they do not love, and which they will lay down again, when temptations assault them, or their affections cool. Where, then, are the truly “obedient children?” Have not we been negligent and trifling, wavering and changeable? Has not “our goodness been as a morning cloud, and as the early dew, which goeth away†?”

The most eminent Christians may be checked in their course, or turned aside by their spiritual enemies. But they do not “continue in sin,” or renounce the faith: and their temporary failures will not justify or extenuate the continual deviations of those, who are steadfast in nothing but transgression. Christians also differ exceedingly from each other in the measure or degree of their actual services. But they have “one heart,” they all propose the same object, they all aim at perfection. Consider

* Mark vi. 20.

† Hosea vi. 4.

IV. The principles of christian obedience. It is of great moment to ascertain, what these are : for the Lord chiefly regards the state of the heart, and not merely the external service or the outward appearance. Now in every acceptable work it is obvious that His will must be respected, His authority revered, and the justice of His claims admitted. For can we suppose, that He is pleased with those selfish performances, which are not done unto Him, but to gratify inclination or promote convenience? We should act in the first place from this conviction, that we are the Lord's, and that He has a right to govern us. Thus we bow to his sceptre, and adore him as the almighty Sovereign.

Proceeding then to execute his high commands, we should be careful in every thing to maintain that faith in the Saviour, "without which it is impossible to please Him*." In this spirit of dependence upon Christ we should apply to Him for strength to do good ; and after all our efforts, being deeply sensible that we are totally destitute of merit, we must make mention of his name and of his righteousness only before the Father, and pray that all our works may be presented through his sacrifice and mediation. The unbeliever may boast of the duties he has performed, but he is a rebel against God in his heart, and

* Heb. xi. 6.

must therefore be offensive, refusing subjection to the first and main precept of the gospel. The Pharisee may be diligent and zealous in acts of piety; but while he prefers the presumptuous claim of a deserved reward, his mercenary services are odious.

“The statutes of the Lord are right* :” they should be approved as every way excellent, and it should appear to us not only necessary, but a happiness and a privilege to obey them. We should move with cheerful steps to accomplish what He requires, and, like the angels, account ourselves honoured in bearing his high behests. Is it thus that we act, not from constraint but willingly, from love to his name? How else will He be pleased with our sacrifices? For “God loveth a cheerful giver†.”

Our simple desire also should be, in the whole course of our obedience, that He may be exalted. This surely must be meet and right, and the principle is indispensably required. “Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God ‡.” There is no nobler motive that can actuate the human mind. Compared to this, how paltry are all our little selfish views! how mean the considerations of our own reputation or advancement! how detestable the plans, which are conducted by avarice, ambition, or even religious ostentation, from which all regard to the

* Psalm xix. 8.

† 2 Cor. ix. 7.

‡ 1 Cor. x. 31.

honour of God must be excluded! And if those works only are to be denominated good, which are directed to a good end, how few will stand the test! How many, which are admired and applauded amongst men, will hereafter be rejected as “reprobate silver!” O let us pray, that God may sanctify and govern both our hearts and minds! Consider again

V. The happy effects of an uniform course of true, spiritual obedience. These have already been stated in a preceding essay; but we shall not be charged with an unmeaning repetition, if we now remark, that while we “abound in the work of the Lord, our labour will not be in vain in the Lord*.” He looks with complacency and delight on the gracious dispositions of his people, which are no other than the fruits of his Spirit, and is pleased with their exertions “for his name’s sake.” He takes notice of “the widow’s mite,” presented in faith, and will recompense the “cup of cold water,” administered to one of the least of his brethren. What a high commendation of their services it is, that they are “an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God†!”

They are honourable to Him. They vindicate his character amongst men, and prove, to the confusion of his enemies, that He is a holy God, who hath no pleasure in wickedness: “For the righteous Lord loveth righteousness; His countenance

* 1 Cor. xv. 58.

† Phil. iv. 18.

doth behold the upright*.”—The pure, disinterested, persevering obedience of believers is ornamental to the gospel. By their conscientious attention to their various relative duties, in their different ranks of life, they “adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour†,” conciliate the favourable regard of others to his service, and induce them to become followers of Him “in faith and verity.”

Thus their goodness, though it “extendeth not to the Lord,” as it cannot add to his essential glory or happiness, is highly beneficial. It contributes to the edification and enlargement of the church; it most effectually promotes its peace and prosperity. It diffuses blessings in the world around; it alleviates misery, and administers comfort; it restrains wickedness, heals contentions, instructs the ignorant, and not unfrequently succeeds, by “converting the sinner from the error of his way, in saving a soul from death, and hiding a multitude of sins‡.”—“These things are good and profitable unto men§.” How many may reap the advantage of your perseverance in holiness; yourselves, your families, your country, the church of God, and generations yet unborn!

Suffer then “the word of exhortation.” Yield yourselves unto God, and let all your faculties and members be occupied as “instruments of righteousness.” You will experience his service to be

* Psalm xi. 7.

† Titus ii. 10.

‡ James. v. 20.

§ Titus iii. 8.

the most perfect freedom. Having entered on a religious course, be not discouraged by difficulties; but press forwards with increasing ardour, and aim continually at higher degrees of grace and usefulness. How much yet remains to be done, both for yourselves and others! O “give diligence, —be steadfast and unmoveable.”

Sinners, who know not God, are diligent and persevering in the prosecution of their plans. They are obedient to their own master, and serve him with their whole hearts. But how wretched their bondage! how tremendous the effects of their wickedness, to themselves, and to others! How bitter the fruits, even in the present life, and how black the prospect in futurity! “For the wages of sin is death*!”

* Rom. vi. 23.

ESSAY LIX.

ON THE COMFORT OF THE HOLY GHOST.

To remove the prejudices of those, who object to religion, as of a gloomy tendency, it is maintained,—that there is a peculiar blessedness bestowed on true believers,—that this joy is of a spiritual nature,—that the Holy Ghost is the author of it,—and that it is essentially connected with holiness.

TRUE Christianity has been much misunderstood. Few seem to be aware, what is its nature, or what are its effects. Professions, forms, and ceremonies, have been substituted, and warmly contended for, instead of its real essence, which is but little attended to. Such abuses and misrepresentations prevailed even in primitive times, for the correction of which the apostles laboured most assiduously. St. Paul stands the foremost in this service, and with his usual vigour declares, “The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost *.”

* Rom. xiv. 17.

In conformity with this sentiment we maintain, that religion consists not in debating either for or against any external rite, be it what it may, but in something far more solid and excellent: it renews the soul in holiness, and, through the agency of the divine Spirit, establishes it in a state of high felicity. We have already considered two of those points, which are said to constitute “the kingdom of God,”—“righteousness” or sanctification, and “peace” which flows from it. We may now extend our observations to the third particular in the apostle’s catalogue, and enquire of what sort is that “joy in the Holy Ghost,” of which he speaks. The subject is important: it is also well calculated to remove the prejudices of ignorance. Are there not those, who are unwilling to give a serious and fixed attention to the religion of the gospel, under the idea that its doctrines and precepts, if strictly enforced, would produce terror, melancholy, and despair. It is proper they should be undeceived, and be convinced that the contrary effect would take place. Only let “the kingdom of God” be set up “within them,” and, as the happy consequence, they will experience “joy in the Holy Ghost.” We remark then,

I. There is a peculiar blessedness bestowed on true believers. This point is earnestly maintained by the sacred writers both of the old and the new testament: and it is worthy of observation,

they speak of it not as a matter of uncertainty or speculation, but as a fact attested by innumerable witnesses of undoubted veracity. Let us hear their testimony.

“Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance. In thy name shall they rejoice all the day: and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted. For thou art the glory of their strength: and in thy favour our horn shall be exalted.” On this persuasion is grounded the petition, “Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people: O visit me with thy salvation: That I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation: that I may glory with thine inheritance*.” The divine promise confirms the expectation,—“The work of righteousness shall be peace: and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever †.”

The disciples of Christ were warned, that “in the world they should have tribulation,” but were also taught to expect, that “the joy of their Lord should remain in them, and that their joy should be full ‡.” Nor were they disappointed of their hope: they went forth, “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for

* Psalm lxxxix. 15—17. cvi. 4, 5. † Isaiah xxxii. 17.

‡ John xv. 11. xvi. 33.

his name*:" The whole company of primitive believers speak in strongest terms of their exalted happiness: "Being justified by faith,—we rejoice in hope of the glory of God: and not only so, but we glory in tribulations also:—we joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement."—"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us †." They express the liveliest gratitude on this account, "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulation;—for as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ:"—"Whom having not seen, we love; in whom, though now we see him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory ‡."

Is there nothing of the same holy delight and transport to be experienced in our day? Is the nature or the effect of Christianity totally altered by the lapse of time? Or are they not deserving of credit, who still profess to receive the strong

* Acts v. 41.

† Rom. v. 1—3, 11. viii. 35, 37.

‡ 2 Cor. i. 3—5. 1 Peter i. 8.

consolations of the Spirit? May we not rather suspect from the general languor of Christians, so called, and from their ignorance of all devotional fervour and elevation, that but few comparatively feel or understand the powerful influence of our religion? Men expect not, that it will render them happy in the present life; and therefore it is accounted a sure mark of enthusiasm, to talk of the anticipations of heaven.

It is allowed, indeed, that believers may meet with sad obstructions and interruptions of their comfort, from various causes. Infirmities and diseases of body, partial and erroneous views of the gospel, a constitutional gloom of mind, and the malignant interference of Satan, may for a time darken their prospects, and produce acute distress. But these are excepted cases; the melancholy here objected to is to be traced to other sources, and cannot fairly be ascribed to the principles of true religion: it does not therefore subvert the general position we are now maintaining.

II. This joy is of a spiritual nature. Believers may in common with others partake of animal gratifications and worldly comforts: but these form not their chief, or their appropriate happiness. They quarrel not with earthly things from moroseness of temper; but they cannot pursue them with ardour, or idolize them as the highest good, because they have found them vain,

deceitful, and ensnaring. The Lord God Almighty is their object, their desire, their portion, and their joy. His favour they seek and long for, as “better than life itself,” constituting an enjoyment fully adequate to the largest capacities of their souls. They walk with God, cultivating his friendship; and they rejoice in Him, while He is pleased to “lift up the light of his countenance upon them.”

This their peculiar felicity depends not upon external circumstances. The poor, the despised, the sick, and the destitute, are not necessarily deprived of it by the difficulties of their situation. It may be, and often is, maintained in deepest afflictions; its liveliness and vigour have been known to increase amidst tremendous storms and tempests, and to rise superior to pains and losses, and to all the terrors of death itself. This point is sufficiently established by the scriptures already quoted. It is also confirmed by numerous examples. Joseph was banished from his father's house and from his country, was sold as a slave, was basely calumniated, and suffered many indignities in a prison; but “THE LORD WAS WITH JOSEPH*.”—David was cruelly persecuted and driven from city to city, was deprived of all his substance and of the dearest members of his family, and was threatened with instant death by

* Gen. xxxix. 2, 21.

his own adherents; but “HE ENCOURAGED HIMSELF IN THE LORD HIS GOD*.” One prophet exclaims, “My flesh and my heart faileth, but GOD IS THE STRENGTH OF MY HEART, AND MY PORTION FOR EVER†:”—and another thus exults, “Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I WILL REJOICE IN THE LORD, I WILL JOY IN THE GOD OF MY SALVATION‡.”

The saints of the new testament discovered at least equal felicity and triumph in all their complicated troubles. The countenance of St. Stephen brightened with glory, and he spake and looked as one upon the verge of heaven, in the presence of his murderers, and even under the pains of the most violent death§.—St. Paul and Silas his companion, with lacerated bodies, were thrust into a dungeon and fastened in the stocks; but, regardless of their stripes and all the horrors of their situation, they were heard “at midnight singing praises unto God||.” The sufferings of the apostle were so numerous and severe, that the recital is enough to overwhelm us with conster-

* 1st Sam. xxx. 6.

† Psalm lxxiii. 26.

‡ Habak. iii. 17, 18.

§ Acts vi. 15. vii. 55—60.

|| Acts xvi. 24, 25.

nation ; but he declares amidst them all, “ I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation * : ” and with an invincible fortitude of mind, as if he courted martyrdom, he thus speaks in contempt of danger and of death, “ The Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying, That bonds and afflictions abide me ; but none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy † . ”

The whole of this description proves, that the happiness of true religion is of a solid, permanent nature, depending not on accidental circumstances, so much as on fixed principles of the mind ; that it consists not in flights of the imagination, in extatic raptures, or sudden visionary impulses, but in a persuasion of the divine favour through the sacrifice and obedience of Jesus Christ, in right affections towards God, and in the lively hope of eternal bliss and glory. Let us beware of falling into mistakes and delusions, by which many bring the very profession of the gospel into contempt, and render their own sincerity suspicious.

III. The Holy Ghost is the author of all true spiritual consolation. He is therefore called by an appropriate title THE COMFORTER. He alone removes distress ; and He alone establishes peace

* 2 Cor. vii. 4.

† Acts xx. 23, 24.

in the soul. Does not the chief part of human misery arise from the predominance of impure desires and malignant tempers? It is His prerogative to subdue these corruptions of our nature, the invariable tendency of which is to disquiet and torment. If pride and covetousness, if jealousy and lust, if envy and resentment, are deprived of their rule in the heart, the main sources of calamity and wretchedness are dried up. But He also implants, maintains, and invigorates, those principles and affections, which tranquillize the mind and guard it against all undue perturbation. Where meekness and gentleness, where temperance, patience, and forbearance, where the love of God and of man prevail, peace and joy must dwell as their attendant guests. But all these are the fruits of the Spirit; and therefore such as are renewed by his grace, may be pronounced truly blessed.

Thousands are rendered miserable, and think life itself an insupportable burden, under a conviction of their guilt and of their liableness to the fierce anger of almighty God. How shall their conscience be pacified, and that horrible dread be removed? Nothing will avail for the purpose, but the knowledge of Jesus Christ and of Him crucified: and this knowledge is the gift of the Holy Ghost. "He shall glorify me," said our Lord; "for He shall receive of mine,

and shall shew it unto you*.” St. Paul also describes this divine agent as “the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ †.” He enables the trembling penitent to believe, and encourages him to cast away his desponding apprehensions. He testifies of his acceptance with God, and inspires him with filial confidence to approach the throne of grace. “For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father ‡.” Is there any felicity upon earth to be compared with this?

We have spoken of the support administered to afflicted believers: but it should be remembered that all the strength, courage, and consolation, which they experience under trouble, they derive from the Spirit’s influence. It is He, who cheers and animates them in their deepest sorrows by the seasonable and rich communications of his grace. “He comforteth those who are cast down,” by giving them “his seal and earnest in their hearts.” Thus, when “the power of Christ resteth upon them,” then they can “take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake: for though they are weak, then they are

* John xvi. 14.

† Eph. i. 17.

‡ Rom. viii. 15.

strong*.” How amazing the difference in the state of the mind, produced only by “the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ †!” It is such as cannot be ascribed to natural strength or fortitude, or to any external circumstances, but solely and exclusively to His sovereign and almighty agency.

“There be many that say, Who will shew us any good?” But be it our prayer, “Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us ‡.” To be truly happy, we must “live in the Spirit, and walk in the Spirit §.” For these vivifying, consoling influences, we must send up our continual and fervent supplications, and wait for them with humility, faith, and patience. Having received his gracious assistance, we must also beware of “grieving” this holy visitant by any misconduct, lest He depart and leave us in darkness, fear, and despondency. We must use all diligence and circumspection, and watch over our tempers, lest we “quench” the fire, which he hath kindled ||. For

IV. The joy of the Spirit is essentially connected with holiness. This is a remark of peculiar importance, and will furnish matter for necessary caution in the present times. We deplore the prevalence of enthusiasm, and of many

* 2 Cor. i. 22. vii. 6. xii. 9, 10. † Phil. i. 19.

‡ Psalm iv. 6. § Gal. v. 25.

|| Eph. iv. 30. 1 Thess. v. 19.

wild theories resulting from it. There are those, who are eager to be established in a religious confidence and assurance, and yet neglect the proper and appointed means. Their object is to attain a high degree of that felicity, of which others speak, but they attend not to the regulation of their lives and dispositions. Many even boast of their transports and extasies, as if they were the favourites of heaven, while they are proud or covetous, overbearing or vindictive. Is this to be accounted the genuine influence of the Spirit? “Are these his doings*?” May we not suspect the work of an enemy, who would expose all religious joy to ridicule and contempt by shameful pretences to it? “For Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light†.” O beware of this awful, ruinous delusion!

There are other fruits of the Spirit, besides comfort, and of greater importance: they are at least inseparably connected with it, and should be sought and cultivated, in order to its attainment. Mark its commencement: you must experience contrition and godly sorrow, and “sow in tears,” if you would “reap in joy:” you must “labour and be heavy-laden,” if you would “find rest unto your souls‡.” Contemplate its continuance and progress: it will abide with you, or be withdrawn, according as you may be watchful or negligent. “The secret of the Lord is

* Micah ii. 7.

† 2 Cor. xi. 14.

‡ Psalm cxxvi. 5. Matt. xi. 28, 29.

with them that fear him:" and therefore he promises, "To him that ordereth his conversation aright, will I shew the salvation of God *." Trace it to its consummation in heaven: you will still find it connected with holiness. For who are "the blessed," that "shall see God," but "the pure in heart †?" Who shall behold his face in glory, but they who shall "awake with his likeness ‡?"

The subject should be improved by a faithful and minute examination. Of what sort is your enjoyment? In what objects do you find the highest delight? What do you most eagerly covet or pursue? Are you at all acquainted with spiritual joy? Or is "your affection set on things above?" Alas! how many are grovelling on the earth, like the beasts that perish! who know and desire no more exalted pleasure, than the gratification of their grossest appetites! Is this the happiness of rational and immortal creatures? Can the redeemed of the Lord and the heirs of glory be so degraded?

Or, if you speak of receiving the strong consolations of the Spirit, we must enquire again, Is your conduct consistent with your professions? Do you prove by your humility and self-denial, by your overcoming evil with good, by your persevering imitation of our Lord's example, by your conscientious attention to relative duties, and all

* Psalm xxv. 14. 1. 23. † Matt. v. 8. ‡ Psalm xvii. 15.

the varied labours of love, that God is with you of a truth? For most assuredly, “The Lord is with you, while ye be with Him*:” but “if ye walk contrary unto Him, He will also walk contrary unto you.” He declares to evil-doers, “When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear:” and He will profess unto them at the last day, “I NEVER KNEW YOU; depart from me, ye that work iniquity †!”

* 2 Chron. xv. 2.

† Lev. xxvi. 21, 24, Isaiah i. 15, Matt. vii. 23.

ESSAY LX.

ON THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT.

The Holy Ghost acts as a Spirit of adoption, inspiring filial love and confidence. What his witness is,—and how it is connected with that of our own spirit.—This “full assurance of hope” is described as the privilege and attainment of believers,—yet is not essential to faith,—is a reasonable expectation,—and will produce the best effects.

BEFORE we close our account of the various offices of the Holy Ghost, it will be necessary to notice more distinctly that operation of his grace, by which He inspires the faithful with confidence towards God from the knowledge of their present acceptance, and of the security of their future inheritance. To this knowledge of their salvation they are called, and many of them at least are spoken of as having actually attained to the enjoyment of the privilege. “They have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but they have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby they cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself

beareth witness with their spirit, that they are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ*.” Such is the apostolical description of their blessedness, and there can be none more exalted, none more discriminative of their state and character. Here we perceive the high and generous principles by which they are actuated; the peace, the confidence, and joy, which they possess; and the divine agency, by which these things are effected.

They, who were strangers and enemies to God, are taken into his family, and acknowledged as his sons and daughters. This is ADOPTION; and their disposition accords with that of dutiful, affectionate, and beloved children. Once they might be under the “SPIRIT OF BONDAGE,” influenced by low and servile motives, attentive to duties, not from any delight in them, but dreading the consequences of disobedience, and feeling not the enlivening hope of acceptance. Such is the state of those, “who are under the law,” and whose observance of its precepts is constrained, proceeding only from the terrible apprehension of its curse, and therefore complained of as a severe and wretched drudgery. Such also is the condition of believers upon their first convictions: perceiving their obligations to the di-

* Romans viii. 15—17.

vine law, and its extensive demands, though not its excellence, they labour to fulfil it, but they “labour in the very fire:” their exertions are painful and prevail not, nor can they be released from this rigorous and afflictive servitude, but by a clear view and believing expectation of the mercy revealed in the gospel. This “spirit of bondage” produces “FEAR,” and may for the time have a beneficial tendency, as restraining them from many ills, and preparing them for the reception of Christ. But it is by no means desirable, that they should rest in it; and its entire removal, upon their advancement in the knowledge of salvation, should excite their thankfulness.

Now they serve the Lord in a more cheerful and lively manner; not with less diligence, but upon different principles; not dreading his wrath, or presuming to merit his favour, but as being infinitely indebted to his grace, and rejoicing in his love. This is “THE SPIRIT OF ADOPTION,” which gives them access to God with boldness, and enables them by his own convincing energy, and from decided evidence, to conclude, whose they are, and to what an inheritance they are entitled. With enlarged affections, therefore, of gratitude, love, and zeal, they cry, “ABBA, FATHER,” assured of his parental regard, and feeling towards him the most dutiful subjection of heart. In all this business the Holy Ghost is the prin-

cial agent. He testifieth to them the wondrous fact, but at the same time he calls in the additional testimony of their own consciences, and argues upon it:—"The Spirit itself beareth witness with their spirit, that they are the children of God." Let us investigate the nature of this attestation, and enquire,

I. What is the witness of the Spirit. There is an external testimony of the divine will, to which he demands the attention of the world. The whole of the sacred scriptures are His declaration, making known to us whatever things we should believe, practise, or expect: for "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*." He has also confirmed this testimony by various miraculous operations, which were intended to ratify it, as by his own seal, and to procure for it universal credit and reception. Thus he "gave testimony to the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by the hands of the apostles†."

But the witness, of which we now speak, is of a kind altogether distinct, for it is internal. The religion of Christ is to be found, not only in the written word, but in the hearts of his people: in them at least is the counterpart of what is described in the book of inspiration. Thus "he, that believeth on the Son of God hath the wit-

* 2 Pet. i. 21.

† Acts xiv. 3.

ness IN HIMSELF*.” It is this inward evidence, into which we are enquiring.

The Lord God the Spirit hath wrought a marvellous work in the souls of the redeemed. By his mysterious operation they are “born again,” they become “new creatures,” or are created anew, they are “risen from the dead,” and “quickened together with Christ.” Yet through their remaining ignorance and depravity, and in consequence of setting up false marks and evidences, they may not be fully aware of the change which He has produced. He alone can disperse their doubts and fears concerning it, and give them an entire persuasion of its reality. This he does by shining upon his work, and exhibiting it to their view. Then they are constrained to allow, that “He hath delivered them from the power of darkness, and hath translated them into the kingdom of Christ †;” and they exclaim in admiration, gratitude, and praise, “What hath God wrought ‡!” By his sovereign and gracious act, in adoption and regeneration, they are admitted into the number of his children; but they enjoy not the full comfort of the privilege, till “they receive the Spirit of adoption, whereby they cry, “ABBA, FATHER.” He alone by his mighty energy convinces them of their happy state: “the Spirit itself beareth witness,—that they are the children of God.”

* 1 John v. 10. † Col. i. 13. ‡ Numb. xxiii. 23.

This persuasion of their acceptance amounts to, what is generally termed, ASSURANCE; a word in some disrepute, and which probably to many persons may convey wrong ideas. It may suggest the notion of a blameable and dangerous presumption, of a rash and insolent forwardness, of an ungrounded confidence, which may be fatal to the possessor. But however the thing may be counterfeited, mistaken, or abused, it will appear upon a fair examination, to be the subject of promise to the faithful, their most inestimable privilege, productive of the most beneficial effects, both in holiness and in comfort. It is the knowledge of forgiveness, the joy of salvation, the hope of heaven. Is this to be objected to? Let it however be carefully remarked, that none but the Holy Ghost can bestow it, and that to Him alone our applications should be made. Let it not be supposed to result from a wild imagination, or the most strenuous exertions we can make. We enquire

II. How the witness of the Spirit is connected with that of our own spirit. This consideration will be of peculiar importance, as it will guard us against the absurdities and mischiefs of enthusiasm. The scriptural assurance, of which we speak, is not produced by any voice or immediate revelation from heaven; it is not built upon any dreams or visions, or the strong impression of any texts of scripture on the mind, nor does it

imply any violent impulse or perturbation. The Holy Spirit works in a rational, and generally in a tranquil and silent way. He calls forth evidence in order to establish his conclusion, and such evidence as is not obscure or equivocal, but clear and incontrovertible. It is that of "our own spirit;" by which we understand, not the strength of fancy, not any bold confidence, of which we can give no consistent account, but the prevailing tempers and dispositions of our own minds, as subdued and sanctified by the grace of God, and brought into a state of cheerful subjection to his will.

Do we possess sincere contrition and abhorrence of sin? Do we feel a supreme regard to Christ, and unreserved dependence upon him? Is the favour of God in our estimation preferable to all the world can offer us? Do we love his service, even when most arduous; and account it our highest privilege to promote his glory? These are the fruits of the Spirit, and by Him they may be so clearly displayed, as effectually to convince us that we are partakers of his influence, and that He has begun in us that "good work," which will be consummated in heaven. Such is his testimony, united with that of a devoted heart and a good conscience.

This representation of the subject will also preserve us from the licentiousness of Antinomianism. For according to the statement here

given, whatever may be the bold pretences of hypocrites and deceivers, the assurance of true believers is not consistent with the love or practice of any sin. It is necessarily connected with integrity and purity of mind, that is, with sanctification : yet no legal or self-righteous principle is hereby encouraged, though the interests of evangelical holiness are promoted and secured. For what is the witness of a carnal heart, enslaved to sin and alienated from the love of God? What are its plans, its purposes, and desires? If these be fairly stated, will they furnish any declaration, on which the Holy Spirit will ground a favourable inference?

Let the solemn enquiry then be made, What has He wrought in our hearts? What are our dispositions towards God, or his law? Do we admire his perfections? Do we cheerfully submit to his authority? Do we esteem all his precepts to be right? What is the state of our minds towards Christ and his salvation? Is He our hope, our life, our peace, our joy? And are we, through the knowledge and the faith of Him, crucified to the world, and dead to sin? Who are the persons, and what the objects, which engage our warmest affections? Do we “love the brethren?” As “strangers and pilgrims on the earth, are we seeking a better country?” Can we say, “To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain?” A satisfactory reply to these enquiries would furnish a

strong and decisive evidence in our favour, of which we should not be reluctant to take the comfort. Even an apostle was consoled and animated by perceiving within himself the marks of divine grace: "Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world *." And shall not we make the same appeal? If the Lord has wrought effectually in us, to reconcile us to himself, and to give us a holy consistency, strength, and delight in his service, why should we deny his work, or endeavour to disprove its reality? Let us rather cheerfully acknowledge it with grateful adoration, and rejoice in the assurance of his love.

This is a doctrine, which has met with much opposition and reproach. And possibly that treatment may in part have arisen from the absurd representations or the sad abuses of it, which, so far from vindicating, we lament and condemn. But we maintain that "the full assurance of hope" is described throughout the scriptures as the privilege and attainment of believers. Do not these favoured persons, in different ages, speak the same language of lively confidence? Even in the old testament they declare, "The Lord of hosts is with us; the God

of Jacob is our refuge.”—“ O God, thou art my God, early will I seek thee.”—“ Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.”—“ Behold, God is my salvation: I will trust, and not be afraid.”—“ I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.”—Thus they testified, even in the darkness of ancient dispensations, that “ the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever *.”

The full and clear light of the gospel revelation was not calculated to produce doubt and uncertainty. Accordingly, the primitive Christians spake and acted as men assured of their acceptance and salvation. “ When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son: much more being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.”—“ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?—We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.”—“ Therefore we are always confident, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.”—“ For our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:”—“ Whom having not seen we love; in whom, though now we see him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.”—“ We know that

* Psalm xlv. 7. lxiii. 1. lxxiii. 24. Isaiah xii. 2.
xxxii. 17. Hab. iii. 18.

we are of God, and shall assure our hearts before him. We know that we dwell in Him, and He in us, because He hath given us of his Spirit. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him, as he is*.”

A strong argument for this doctrine is also derived from those descriptions, which represent the work of the Spirit as a SEAL or an EARN-EST: “God hath sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts:”—“After that ye also believed in Christ, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance †.” What other interpretation can be given, but this, that the conversion and sanctification of believers, their knowledge, faith, and love, are as the stamp of God, which the Holy Ghost has impressed upon their souls, whereby they are marked and acknowledged for his own, their interest in his covenant is ascertained to them, and an infallible pledge is given them of their perseverance and final salvation?

Why is human ingenuity to be put to the stretch, to explain away this forcible language, as if it meant nothing, or nothing to us? Shall we allow that the privilege and the blessedness,

* Rom. v. 10. viii. 35, 37. 2 Cor. v. 6, 8. Phil. iii. 20.

1 Pet. i. 8. 1 John iii. 2, 19. iv. 13. v. 19.

† 2 Cor. i. 22. Eph. i. 13, 14.

which it describes, were confined to the primitive times? No, they are understood and experienced in the present day. Much as modern Christians may seem to be enervated, not a few among them can speak of their hopes and enjoyments even as ancient saints, and adopt the same strong declarations. We refer, not to the enraptured visionary and wild enthusiast, but to men of clear discernment and solid piety, who are generally allowed to be prudent and judicious upon other subjects. Why is their testimony to the point in question to be discredited? The ignorance or inexperience of others ought not to be urged as an objection: it is the shame and reproach of many, that they have not attained the same happiness. But it is the Spirit only, that “re-vealeth the things, which God hath prepared for them that love him.” “The natural man receiveth them not: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned *.”

Yet the assurance, of which we speak, is not essential to faith. It will generally accompany a high degree of it. But there are sincere persons, who are endued with only small measures of grace, or in whom the exercise of that grace may be greatly obstructed. Where such defects or hindrances prevail, many fears and distresses may be expected to arise. There may be a

* 1 Cor. ii. 9, 10, 14.

“need” for them to be “in heaviness for a season through manifold temptations*.” They may be forcibly appealed to, as to the ground of their suspense and perplexity, “O thou of little faith, wherefore dost thou doubt†?” But they should be encouraged: “Them, that are weak in the faith, receive you;—bear their infirmities‡.”—“Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees.”—“Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God§.” In dependence on the divine promise, and in the diligent use of means, let him hope and quietly wait for the knowledge of salvation; nor shall he be disappointed in the end.

Who shall presume to say, that this knowledge is unattainable? Is it impossible for God to have such an access to our mind, as to assure us of his love? Or would such a communication be unworthy of Him? Who shall limit the greatness of his power, or the riches of his grace? Nay, is it not a most reasonable expectation, that He will manifest his favour to his people, and thus animate them to persevere in his service? Are not you solicitous to attach your dear children to yourselves, by a full declaration of your affec-

* 1 Peter i. 6.

† Matthew xiv. 31.

‡ Romans xiv. 1. x. 1.

§ Isaiah xxxv. 3. l. 10.

tionate regard? And while the children of God meet with so many discouragements both within and without them, shall their heavenly Father keep them in a servile dread of his displeasure, or in a state of tremendous suspense as to their eternal destination? No: He yearns with tenderness and compassion towards them, and will hasten to administer consolation.

Who then shall say, that any bad effects, injurious to the cause of truth and holiness, will follow from this assurance? We do not vindicate every vain pretender to "the witness of the Spirit:" we are aware that there are those, in whose professions of religion we can see nothing but their forwardness and confidence to recommend them. But let us not reject any doctrine of revelation, through an over-anxious fear of consequences. Is it necessary that men should be kept in continual dread of damnation, in order to render them circumspect, and ensure their attention to duty? Will not the well-grounded expectation of heaven prove far more efficacious in these very respects? "Every man, that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as God is pure *." Love is the noblest and strongest principle of obedience: nor can it be, but that a sense of God's love to us will increase our desire to please him, and animate our zeal to promote his

* 1 John iii. 3.

glory. The fear, which arises from suspicion, will alienate our affections, and check all our energies; but “the joy of the Lord will be our strength*.”

That we may further improve the subject,

1. Let us shake off all spiritual sloth, and be roused to the most strenuous efforts to procure the blessing. Such is St. Peter’s direction, “The rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure†.” It is not to be obtained without earnest seeking, perhaps long waiting. Press forwards, then, without weariness, and labour yet more abundantly. If all your endeavours hitherto have been unsuccessful, search out the cause. Is there no sin to be put away? no right hand to be cut off? no right eye to be plucked out? Beware of grieving the Spirit by any negligence or misconduct; and refuse not his consolations by the perverseness of unbelief.

2. Let us be solicitous to preserve a lively hope by an honourable deportment, and by cultivating a holy fellowship with God. However strong be our confidence, or rapturous our enjoyments, sin would soon bring us down from our eminence, cover us with darkness and disgrace, and excite the most horrible apprehensions. We should not wonder that we are oppressed with fears, if we are not circumspect; the God of purity will

* Nehem. viii. 10.

† 2 Pet. i. 10.

assuredly punish us for our unfaithfulness in his covenant, by withdrawing from us the light and comfort of his Spirit. Alas ! what sad interruptions, and what acute distresses arise from these shameful declensions and inconsistencies ! Every failure, indeed, ought not to cast us down ; nor should we conclude from one instance of transgression, that all our former professions were false and hypocritical. But it bodes ill, when those, who fall and are not “ renewed again unto repentance,” lose nothing of their confidence. Then

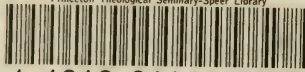
3. Let us examine, of what sort our religious comforts are. Under the fear of being deceived, let us enquire, Whence do they come, whither do they lead, and what is their effect ? Are they such, as we may fairly conclude to originate from the Spirit of grace, and not from the delusive suggestions of Satan ? Do they draw forth our hearts in warmest affections to God ? Do they render sin more odious, and obedience more delightful ? Does “ the Spirit of adoption ” produce in us the filial dispositions of reverence and submission, trust, gratitude, and affection, towards our heavenly Father ? Let praise be given to Him for whatever is good in ourselves : and while we desire to serve him with fidelity and zeal, let the firm persuasion of his love inspire our souls with the most blissful expectations. For thus we may

argue, "If we be children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ."

4. To careless sinners this may seem an uninteresting subject: but we ask, Will you not listen to the word of friendly admonition? What is the Spirit you have received? Who is your father? There is a rule laid down, by which "the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil*." Can you bear to be tried by that rule? Or have you no fears of the result? Will you not consider, What will the end be? Have you not some awful presages of impending destruction?—Yet bad as your case is, we know what the grace of God can effect. He can pardon: He can sanctify: He can still adopt you into his own family, and you shall become the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty. Will you not pray for, desire, or accept this grace? What? Are you content to be "the children of wrath?" O that you would cry mightily for deliverance, if peradventure the rich mercy of the gospel may still be extended to you, and Jesus Christ be glorified in your everlasting salvation!

* 1 John iii. 10.

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